MORE STORIES FROM TAGORE

MORE STORIES FROM TAGORE

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
CALCUTTA, BOMBAY, MADRAS, LONDON
1953

MACMILLAN AND COMPANY LIMITED
London Bombay Calcutta Madras Melbourne
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED
Toronto
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS INC.
New York

First Edition 1951
Reprinted 1953

MADE IN INDIA

PRINTED AT THE I. S. S. D. PRESS, MADRAS 2

PREFACE

The continued popularity of *Stories from Tagore* has encouraged the compilation of this companion volume containing a further selection of tales and similar word-lists and explanatory notes. It is hoped that it will commend itself to those who have found its predecessor so valuable in the teaching and study of English.

Every experienced teacher is familiar with the difficulty in instructing Indian students from books originally intended for use in English schools. It is not merely that the subjects are unfamiliar, but almost every phrase has English associations that are strange to Indian ears. The environment in which they are written is unknown to the Indian student and his mind becomes overburdened with details which he cannot easily understand. He cannot give his whole attention to the language and thus master it quickly.

The present Indian story-book avoids some at least of these impediments. The surroundings described in it are those of the student's everyday life; the sentiments and characters are familiar. The stories, which are taken from three English collections, "*Mashi*," "*Hungry Stones*," and "*Broken Ties*,"

are simply told, and the notes at the end of the book will be sufficient to explain obscure passages. Those students who have read the stories in the original will have the further advantage of knowing beforehand the whole trend of the narrative, and thus they will be able to concentrate their thoughts on the English language itself.

The list of words to be studied has been chosen from each story in order to bring to notice different types of English words. The lists are in no sense exhaustive. The end in view has been to endeavour to create an interest in English words and their history which may lead on to further study.

CONTENTS

THE TRUST PROPERTY

I

Brindaban Kundu came to his father in a rage and said: 'I am off this moment.'

'Ungrateful wretch!' sneered the father, Jaganath Kundu. 'When you have paid me back all that I have spent on your food and clothing, it will be time enough to give yourself these airs.'

Such food and clothing as was customary in Jaganath's household could not have cost very much. Our *rishis* of old managed to feed and clothe themselves on an incredibly small outlay. Jaganath's behaviour showed that his ideal in these respects was equally high. That he could not fully live up to it was due partly to the bad influence of the degenerate society around him, and partly to certain unreasonable demands of Nature in her attempt to keep body and soul together.

So long as Brindaban was single, things went smoothly enough, but after his marriage he began to depart from the high and rarefied standard cherished by his sire. It was clear that the son's ideas of comfort were moving away from the spiritual to the material, and imitating the ways of the world. He was unwilling to put up with the discomforts of heat and cold, thirst and hunger. His minimum of food and clothing rose apace.

Frequent were the quarrels between the father and the son. At last Brindaban's wife became

seriously ill and a *kabiraj* was called in. But when the doctor prescribed a costly medicine for his patient, Jaganath took it as a proof of sheer incompetence, and turned him out immediately. At first Brindaban besought his father to allow the treatment to continue; then he quarrelled with him about it, but to no purpose. When his wife died, he abused his father and called him a murderer.

'Nonsense!' said the father. 'Don't people die even after swallowing all kinds of drugs? If costly medicines could save life, how is it that kings and emperors are not immortal? You don't expect your wife to die with more pomp and ceremony that did your mother and your grandmother before her, do you?'

Brindaban might really have derived a great consolation from these words, had he not been overwhelmed with grief and incapable of proper thinking. Neither his mother nor his grandmother had taken any medicine before making their exit from this world, and this was the time-honoured custom of the family. But, alas, the younger generation was unwilling to die according to ancient custom. The English had newly come to the country at the time we speak of. Even in those remote days, the good old folks were horrified at the unorthodox ways of the new generation, and sat speechless, trying to draw comfort from their *hookas*.

Be that as it may, the modern Brindaban said to his old fogy of a father: 'I am off.'

The father instantly agreed, and wished publicly that, should he ever give his son one single pice in future, the gods might reckon his act as shedding the holy blood of cows. Brindaban in his turn

similarly wished that, should he ever accept anything from his father, his act might be held as bad as matricide.

The people of the village looked upon this small revolution as a great relief after a long period of monotony. And when Jaganath disinherited his only son, every one did his best to console him. All were unanimous in the opinion that to quarrel with a father for the sake of a wife was possible only in these degenerate days. And the reason they gave was sound too. ' When your wife dies,' they said, ' you can find a second one without delay. But when your father dies, you can't get another to replace him for love or money.' Their logic no doubt was perfect, but we suspect that the utter hopelessness of getting another father did not trouble the misguided son very much. On the contrary, he looked upon it as a mercy.

Nor did separation fron Brindaban weigh heavily on the mind of his father. In the first place, his absence from home reduced the household expenses. Then, again, the father was freed from a great anxiety. The fear of being poisoned by his son and heir had always haunted him. When he ate his scanty fare, he could never banish the thought of poison from his mind. This fear had abated somewhat after the death of his daughter-in-law, and, now that the son was gone, it disappeared altogether.

But there was one tender spot in the old man's heart. Brindaban had taken away with him his four-year-old son, Gokul Chandra. Now, the expense of keeping the child was comparatively small, and so Jaganath's affection for him was without a

drawback. Still, when Brindaban took him away, his grief, sincere as it was, was mingled at first with calculation as to how much he would save a month by the absence of the two, how much the sum would come to in the year, and what would be the capital to bring it in as interest.

But the empty house, without Gokul Chandra in it to make mischief, became more and more difficult for the old man to live in. There was no one now to play tricks upon him when he was engaged in his *puja*, no one to snatch away his food and eat it, no one to run away with his ink-pot, when he was writing up his accounts. His daily routine of life, now uninterrupted, became an intolerable burden to him. He bethought him that this unworried peace was endurable only in the world to come. When he caught sight of the holes made in his quilt by his grandchild, and the pen-and-ink sketches executed by the same artist on his rush-mat, his heart was heavy with grief. Once upon a time he had reproached the boy bitterly because he had torn his *dhoti* into pieces within the short space of two years; now tears stood in Jaganath's eyes as he gazed upon the dirty remnants lying in the bedroom. He carefully put them away in his safe, and registered a vow that, should Gokul ever come back again, he should not be reprimanded even if he destroyed one *dhoti* a year.

But Gokul did not return, and poor Jaganath aged rapidly. His empty home seemed emptier every day.

No longer could the old man stay peacefully at home. Even in the middle of the day, when all respectable folks in the village enjoyed their after-

dinner siesta, Jaganath might be seen roaming over the village, *hooka* in hand. The boys, at sight of him, would give up their play, and, retiring in a body to a safe distance, chant verses composed by a local poet, praising the old gentleman's economical habits. No one ventured to say his real name, lest he should have to go without his meal that day—and so people gave him names after their own fancy. Elderly people called him Jaganash, but the reason why the younger generation preferred to call him a vampire was hard to guess. It may be that the bloodless, dried-up skin of the old man had some physical resemblance to the vampire's.

II

One afternoon, when Jaganath was rambling as usual through the village lanes shaded by mango topes, he saw a boy, apparently a stranger, assuming the captaincy of the village boys and explaining to them the scheme of some new prank. Won by the force of his character and the startling novelty of his ideas, the boys had all sworn allegiance to him. Unlike the others, he did not run away from the old man as he approached, but came quite close to him and began to shake his own *chadar*. The result was that a live lizard sprang out of it on to the old man's body, ran down his back and off towards the jungle. Sudden fright made the poor man shiver from head to foot, to the great amusement of the other boys, who shouted with glee. Before Jaganath had gone far, cursing and swearing, the *gamcha* on his shoulder suddenly disappeared, and the next moment it was seen on the head of the new boy, transformed into a turban.

The novel attentions of this manikin came as a great relief to Jaganath. It was long since any boy had taken such freedom with him. After a good deal of coaxing and many fair promises, he at last persuaded the boy to come to him, and this was the conversation which followed:

'What's your name, my boy?'

'Nitai Pal.'

'Where's your home?'

'Won't tell.'

'Who's your father?'

'Won't tell.'

'Why won't you?'

'Because I have run away from home.'

'What made you do it?'

'My father wanted to send me to school.'

It occurred to Jaganath that it would be useless extravagance to send such a boy to school, and his father must have been an unpractical fool not to have thought so.

'Well, well,' said Jaganath, 'how would you like to come and stay with me?'

'Don't mind,' said the boy, and forthwith he installed himself in Jaganath's house. He felt as little hesitation as though it were the shadow of a tree by the wayside. And not only that. He began to proclaim his wishes as regards his food and clothing with such coolness that you would have thought he had paid his reckoning in full beforehand; and, when anything went wrong, he did not scruple to quarrel with the old man. It had been easy enough for Jaganath to get the better of his own child; but, now, where another man's child was concerned, he had to acknowledge defeat.

III

The people of the village marvelled when Nitai Pal was unexpectedly made so much of by Jaganath. They felt sure that the old man's end was near, and the prospect of his bequeathing all his property to this unknown brat made their hearts sore. Furious with envy, they determined to do the boy an injury, but the old man took care of him as though he was a rib in his breast.

At times, the boy threatened that he would go away, and the old man used to say to him temptingly: 'I will leave you all the property I possess.' Young as he was, the boy fully understood the grandeur of this promise.

The village people then began to make inquiries after the father of the boy. Their hearts melted with compassion for the agonised parents, and they declared that the son must be a rascal to cause them so much suffering. They heaped abuses on his head, but the heat with which they did it betrayed envy rather than a sense of justice.

One day the old man learned from a wayfarer that one Damodar Pal was seeking his lost son, and was even now coming towards the village. Nitai, when he heard this, became very restless and was ready to run away, leaving his future wealth to take care of itself. Jaganath reassured him, saying: 'I mean to hide you where nobody can find you—not even the village people themselves.'

This whetted the curiosity of the boy and he said: 'Oh, where? Do show me.'

'People will know, if I show you now. Wait till it is night,' said Jaganath.

The hope of discovering the mysterious hiding-

place delighted Nitai. He planned to himself how, as soon as his father had gone away without him, he would have a bet with his comrades, and play hide-and-seek. Nobody would be able to find him. Wouldn't it be fun? His father, too, would ransack the whole village, and not find him—that would be rare fun also.

At noon, Jaganath shut the boy up in his house, and disappeared for some time. When he came home again, Nitai worried him with questions.

No sooner was it dark than Nitai said: 'Grandfather, shall we go now?'

'It isn't night yet,' replied Jaganath.

A little while later the boy exclaimed: 'It is night now, grandfather; come, let's go.'

'The village people haven't gone to bed yet,' whispered Jaganath.

Nitai waited but a moment, and said: 'They have gone to bed now, grandfather; I am sure they have. Let's start now.'

The night advanced. Sleep began to weigh heavily on the eyelids of the poor boy, and it was a hard struggle for him to keep awake. At midnight, Jaganath caught hold of the boy's arm, and left the house, groping through the dark lanes of the sleeping village. Not a sound disturbed the stillness, except the occasional howl of a dog, when all the other dogs far and near would join in chorus, or perhaps the flapping of a night-bird, scared by the sound of human footsteps at that unusual hour. Nitai trembled with fear, and held Jaganath fast by the arm.

Across many a field they went, and at last came to a jungle, where stood a dilapidated temple

without a god in it. 'What, here!' exclaimed Nitai in a tone of disappointment. It was nothing like what he had imagined. There was not much mystery about it. Often, since running away from home, he had passed nights in deserted temples like this. It was not a bad place for playing hide-and-seek; still it was quite possible that his comrades might track him there.

From the middle of the floor inside, Jaganath removed a slab of stone, and an underground room with a lamp burning in it was revealed to the astonished eyes of the boy. Fear and curiosity assailed his little heart. Jaganath descended by a ladder and Nitai followed him.

Looking around, the boy saw that there were brass *ghurras* on all sides of him. In the middle lay spread an *assan*, and in front of it were arranged vermilion, sandal paste, flowers, and other articles of *puja*. To satisfy his curiosity the boy dipped his hand into some of the *ghurras*, and drew out their contents. They were rupees and gold *mohurs*.

Jaganath, addressing the boy, said: 'I told you, Nitai, that I would give you all my money. I have not got much,—these *ghurras* are all that I possess. These I will make over to you to-day.'

The boy jumped with delight. 'All?' he exclaimed; 'you won't take back a rupee, will you?'

'If I do,' said the old man in solemn tones, 'may my hand be attacked with leprosy. But there is one condition. If ever my grandson, Gokul Chandra, or his son, or his grandson, or his great-grandson or any of his progeny should happen to pass this way, then you must make over to him, or to them, every rupee and every *mohur* here.'

The boy thought that the old man was raving. 'Very well,' he replied.

'Then sit on this *assan*,' said Jaganath.

'What for?'

'Because *puja* will be done to you.'

'But why?' said the boy, taken aback.

'This is the rule.'

The boy squatted on the *assan* as he was told. Jaganath smeared his forehead with sandal paste, put a mark of vermilion between his eyebrows, flung a garland of flowers round his neck, and began to recite *mantras*.

To sit there like a god and hear *mantras* recited made poor Nitai feel very uneasy. 'Grandfather,' he whispered.

But Jaganath did not reply, and went on muttering his incantations.

Finally, with great difficulty he dragged each *ghurra* before the boy and made him repeat the following vow after him:

'I do solemnly promise that I will make over all this treasure to Gokul Chandra Kundu, the son of Brindaban Kundu, the grandson of Jaganath Kundu, or to the son or to the grandson or to the great-grandson of the said Gokul Chandra Kundu, or to any other progeny of his who may be rightful heir.'

The boy repeated this over and over again, until he felt stupefied, and his tongue began to grow stiff in his mouth. When the ceremony was over, the air of the cave was laden with the smoke of the earthen lamp and the breath-poison of the two. The boy felt that the roof of his mouth had become dry as

dust, and his hands and feet were burning. He was nearly suffocated.

The lamp became dimmer and dimmer, and then went out altogether. In the total darkness that followed, Nitai could hear the old man climbing up the ladder. 'Grandfather, where are you going to?' said he, greatly distressed.

'I am going now,' replied Jaganath: 'you remain here. No one will be able to find you. Remember the name Gokul Chandra, the son of Brindaban, and the grandson of Jaganath.'

He then withdrew the ladder. In a stifled, agonised voice the boy implored: 'I want to go back to father.'

Jaganath replaced the slab. He then knelt down and placed his ear on the stone. Nitai's voice was heard once more—'Father'—and then came a sound of some heavy object falling with a bump—and then—everything was still.

Having thus placed his wealth in the hands of a *yak*, Jaganath began to cover up the stone with earth. Then he piled broken bricks and loose mortar over it. On the top of all he planted turfs of grass and jungle weeds. The night was almost spent, but he could not tear himself away from the spot. Now and again he placed his ear to the ground, and tried to listen. It seemed to him that from far, far below—from the abysmal depth of the earth's interior—came a wailing. It seemed to him that the night-sky was flooded with that one sound, that the sleeping humanity of all the world was awake, and was sitting on its beds, trying to listen.

The old man in his frenzy kept on heaping earth higher and higher. He wanted somehow to stifle

that sound, but still he fancied he could hear 'Father.'

He struck the spot with all his might and said: 'Be quiet—people might hear you.' But still he imagined he heard 'Father.'

The sun lighted up the eastern horizon. Jaganath then left the temple, and came into the open fields.

There, too, somebody called out 'Father.' Startled at the sound, he turned back and saw his son at his heels.

'Father,' said Brindaban, 'I hear my boy is hiding himself in your house. I must have him back.'

With eyes dilated and distorted mouth, the old man leaned forward and exclaimed: 'Your boy?'

'Yes, my boy Gokul. He is Nitai Pal now, and I myself go by the name of Damodar Pal. Your *fame* has spread so widely in the neighbourhood, that we were obliged to cover up our origin lest people should have refused to pronounce our names.'

Slowly the old man lifted both his arms above his head. His fingers began to twitch convulsively, as though he was trying to catch hold of some imaginary object in the air. He then fell on the ground.

When he came to his senses again, he dragged his son towards the ruined temple. When they were both inside it, he said: 'Do you hear any wailing sound?'

'No, I don't,' said Brindaban.

'Just listen very carefully. Do you hear anybody calling out "Father"?'

'No.'

This seemed to relieve him greatly.

From that day forward, he used to go about asking people: 'Do you hear any wailing sound?' They laughed at the raving dotard.

About four years later, Jaganath lay on his death-bed. When the light of this world was gradually fading away from his eyes, and his breathing became more and more difficult, he suddenly sat up in a state of delirium. Throwing both his hands in the air he seemed to grope about for something, muttering: 'Nitai, who has removed my ladder?'

Unable to find the ladder to climb out of his terrible dungeon, where there was no light to see and no air to breathe, he fell on his bed once more, and disappeared into that region where no one has ever been found out in the world's eternal game of hide-and-seek.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

degenerate. This word comes from the Latin "degenerare," to become ignoble or grow worse.

besought. Entreated, asked earnestly for. The verb "beseech" is made up of two words—the prefix "be-" and the Middle English "seken" = to seek. Hence it means to ask for, to entreat.

unorthodox. Different from what is usually considered right or true. The word comes from the Greek "orthos," meaning "straight," and "doxa," meaning "opinion."

fogy. Perhaps a variant of the word "foggy" in the obsolete sense of "moss-grown" or "flabby." Here it means an old man with old-fashioned ideas.

matricide. From the Latin "matricida," derived from the combination of "mater" = mother and the suffix—"cida," meaning "the slaughter of."

logic. From the Greek "logike", meaning "of reason."

routine. Regular way of living or working. This word is related to the French "route" = road.

siesta. An afternoon rest or sleep in hot countries. It is a Spanish word, derived originally from the Latin "sexta hora" meaning "sixth-hour."

vampire. A ghost which leaves its grave at night and sucks the blood of sleeping people; a person who preys on others. This word comes from the French, derived from the Magyar "vampir", and is ultimately, perhaps, a word of Turkish origin. There is also the vampire bat, which sucks the blood of sleeping persons and of animals.

allegiance. Loyalty. This word is from the Middle English "ligeaunce" derived from the Old French "ligeance." The "a-" was added in English.

manikin. This word comes from the Dutch "manneken," diminutive of man.

bequeathing. Leaving by will. Derived from the Old English word "becwethan" which is a compound of the prefix "be-" and "cwethan," meaning "to say."

brat. A harsh, contemptuous word for "child." It is of doubtful origin, but there is an obsolete word "brat," applied to swaddling clothes.

ransack. Search (a place) thoroughly. This word is derived from the Old Norse "rannsaka" ("rann" = house, and "saekja" = seek).

dilapidated. Falling into ruin, applied to buildings, furniture, clothing, estate or fortune. It is derived from the Latin "lapis," meaning a "stone." Originally it may have meant "to separate from stone." Compare *lapidary*, *dilapidation*.

dotard. Comes from the word "to dote," meaning to be silly, deranged, feeble-minded. It is related to the Dutch "doten" and the Old French "redoter," and is generally used of old age, as in the phrase *in his dotage*.

delirium. Fever, wandering of the mind. It is related to the Latin word "delirare."

THE KINGDOM OF CARDS

I

Once upon a time there was a lonely island in a distant sea where lived the Kings and Queens, the Aces and the Knaves, in the Kingdom of Cards. The Tens and Nines, with the Twos and Threes, and all the other members, had long ago settled there also. But these were not twice-born people, like the famous Court Cards.

The Ace, the King, and the Knave were the three highest castes. The fourth caste was made up of a mixture of the lower Cards. The Twos and Threes were lowest of all. These inferior Cards were never allowed to sit in the same row with the great Court Cards.

Wonderful indeed were the regulations and rules of that island kingdom. The particular rank of each individual had been settled from time immemorial. Every one had his own appointed work, and never did anything else. An unseen hand appeared to be directing them wherever they went,—according to the Rules.

No one in the Kingdom of Cards had any occasion to think: no one had any need to come to any decision: no one was ever required to debate any new subject. The citizens all moved along in a listless groove without speech. When they fell, they made no noise. They lay down on their backs, and gazed upward at the sky with each prim feature firmly fixed for ever.

There was a remarkable stillness in the Kingdom of Cards. Satisfaction and contentment were complete in all their rounded wholeness. There was never any uproar or violence. There was never any excitement or enthusiasm.

The great ocean, crooning its lullaby with one unceasing melody, lapped the island to sleep with a thousand soft touches of its waves' white hands. The vast sky, like the outspread azure wings of the brooding mother-bird, nestled the island round with its downy plume. Far on the distant horizon a deep blue line betokened another shore. But no sound of quarrel or strife could reach the Island of Cards, to break its calm repose.

II

In that far-off foreign land across the sea, there lived a young Prince whose mother was a sorrowing queen. This queen had fallen from favour, and was living with her only son on the seashore. The Prince passed his childhood alone and forlorn, sitting by his forlorn mother, weaving the net of his big desires. He longed to go in search of the Flying Horse, the jewel in the Cobra's hood, the Rose of Heaven, the Magic Roads, or to find where the Princess Beauty was sleeping in the Ogre's castle over the thirteen rivers and across the seven seas.

From the Son of the Merchant at school the young Prince learnt the stories of foreign kingdoms. From the Son of the Kotwal he learnt the adventures of the Two Genii of the Lamp. And when the rain came beating down, and the clouds covered the sky, he would sit on the threshold facing

the sea, and say to his sorrowing mother: ‘ Tell me, mother, a story of some very far-off land.’

And his mother would tell him an endless tale she had heard in her childhood of a wonderful country beyond the sea where dwelt the Princess Beauty. And the heart of the young Prince would become sick with longing, as he sat on the threshold, looking out on the ocean, listening to his mother’s wonderful story, while the rain outside came beating down and the grey clouds covered the sky.

One day the Son of the Merchant came to the Prince, and said boldly: ‘ Comrade, my studies are over. I am now setting out on my travels to seek my fortune on the sea. I have come to bid you good-bye.’

The Prince said: ‘ I will go with you.’

And the Son of the Kotwal said also: ‘ Comrades, trusty and true, you will not leave me behind. I also will be your companion.’

Then the young Prince said to his sorrowing mother: ‘ Mother, I am now setting out on my travels to seek my fortune. When I come back once more, I shall surely have found some way to remove all your sorrow.’

So the Three Companions set out on their travels together. In the harbour were anchored the twelve ships of the merchant, and the Three Companions got on board. The south wind was blowing, and the twelve ships sailed away, as fast as the desires which rose in the Prince’s breast.

At the Conch Shell Island they filled one ship with conchs. At the Sandal-Wood Island they filled a second ship with sandal-wood, and at the Coral Island they filled a third ship with coral.

Four years passed away, and they filled four more ships, one with ivory, one with musk, one with cloves, and one with nutmegs.

But when these ships were all loaded a terrible tempest arose. The ships were all of them sunk, with their cloves and nutmegs, and musk and ivory, and coral and sandal-wood and conchs. But the ship with the Three Companions struck on an island reef, hurled them safe ashore, and itself broke in pieces.

This was the famous Island of Cards, where lived the Ace and King and Queen and Knave, with the Nines and Tens and all the other members—according to the Rules.

III

Up till now there had been nothing to disturb that island stillness. No new thing had ever happened. No discussion had ever been held.

And then, of a sudden, the Three Companions appeared, thrown up by the sea,—and the Great Debate began. There were three main points of dispute.

First, to what caste should these unclassed strangers belong? Should they rank with the Court Cards? Or were they merely lower-caste people, to be ranked with the Nines and Tens? No precedent could be quoted to decide this weighty question.

Secondly, what was their clan? Had they the fairer hue and bright complexion of the Hearts, or was theirs the darker complexion of the Clubs? Over this question there were interminable disputes. The whole marriage system of the island,

with its intricate regulations, would depend on its nice adjustment.

Thirdly, what food should they take? With whom should they live and sleep? And should their heads be placed south-west, north-west, or only north-east? In all the Kingdom of Cards a series of problems so vital and critical had never been debated before.

But the Three Companions grew desperately hungry. They had to get food in some way or other. So while this debate went on, with its interminable silence and pauses, and while the Aces called their own meeting, and formed themselves into a Committee, to find some obsolete dealing with the question, the Three Companions themselves were eating all they could find, and drinking out of every vessel, and breaking all regulations.

Even the Twos and Threes were shocked at this outrageous behaviour. The Threes said: "Brother Twos, these people are openly shameless!' And the Twos said: 'Brother Threes, they are evidently of lower caste than ourselves!'

After their meal was over, the Three Companions went for a stroll in the city.

When they saw the ponderous people moving in their dismal processions with prim and solemn faces, then the Prince turned to the Son of the Merchant and the Son of the Kotwal, and threw back his head, and gave one stupendous laugh.

Down Royal Street and across the Ace Square and along the Knave Embankment ran the quiver of this strange, unheard-of laughter, the laughter that, amazed at itself, expired in the vast vacuum of silence.

The Son of the Kotwal and the Son of the Merchant were chilled through to the bone by the ghost-like stillness around them. They turned to the Prince, and said: 'Comrade, let us away. Let us not stop for a moment in this awful land of ghosts.'

But the Prince said: 'Comrades, these people resemble men, so I am going to find out, by shaking them upside down and outside in, whether they have a single drop of warm living blood left in their veins.'

IV

The days passed one by one, and the placid existence of the Island went on almost without a ripple. The Three Companions obeyed no rules nor regulations. They never did anything correctly either in sitting or standing or turning themselves round or lying on their back. On the contrary, wherever they saw these things going on precisely and exactly according to the Rules, they gave way to inordinate laughter. They remained unimpressed altogether by the eternal gravity of those eternal regulations.

One day the great Court Cards came to the Son of the Kotwal and the Son of the Merchant and the Prince.

'Why,' they asked slowly, 'are you not moving according to the Rules?'

The Three Companions answered: 'Because that is our *Ichcha* (wish).'

The great Court Cards with hollow, cavernous voices, as if slowly awakening from an age-long dream, said together: '*Ich-cha!* And pray who is *Ich-cha*?'

They could not understand who *Ichcha* was then, but the whole Island was to understand it by-and-by.

The first glimmer of light passed the threshold of their minds when they found out, through watching the actions of the Prince, that they might move in a straight line in an opposite direction from the one in which they had always gone before. Then they made another startling discovery, that there was another side to the Cards which they had never yet noticed with attention. This was the beginning of the change.

Now that the change had begun, the Three Companions were able to initiate them more and more deeply into the mysteries of *Ichcha*. The Cards gradually became aware that life was not bound by regulations. They began to feel a secret satisfaction in the kingly power of choosing for themselves.

But with this first impact of *Ichcha* the whole pack of cards began to totter slowly, and then tumble down to the ground. The scene was like that of some huge python awaking from a long sleep, as it slowly unfolds its numberless coils with a quiver that runs through its whole frame.

V

Hitherto the Queens of Spades and Clubs and Diamonds and Hearts had remained behind curtains with eyes that gazed vacantly into space, or else remained fixed upon the ground.

And now, all of a sudden, on an afternoon in spring the Queen of Hearts from the balcony raised her dark eyebrows for a moment, and cast a single glance upon the Prince from the corner of her eye.

'Great God,' cried the Prince, 'I thought they were all painted images. But I am wrong. They are women after all.'

Then the young Prince called to his side his two Companions, and said in a meditative voice: 'My comrades! There is a charm about these ladies that I never noticed before. When I saw that glance of the Queen's dark, luminous eyes, brightening with new emotion, it seemed to me like the first faint streak of dawn in a newly created world.'

The two Companions smiled a knowing smile, and said: 'Is that really so, Prince?'

And the poor Queen of Hearts from that day went from bad to worse. She began to forget all rules in a truly scandalous manner. If, for instance, her place in the row was beside the Knave, she suddenly found herself quite accidentally standing beside the Prince instead. At this, the Knave, with motionless face and solemn voice, would say: 'Queen, you have made a mistake.'

And the poor Queen of Hearts' red cheeks would get redder than ever. But the Prince would come gallantly to her rescue and say: 'No! There is no mistake. From to-day I am going to be Knave!'

Now it came to pass that, while every one was trying to correct the improprieties of the guilty Queen of Hearts, they began to make mistakes themselves. The Aces found themselves elbowed out by the Kings. The Kings got muddled up with the Knaves. The Nines and Tens assumed airs as though they belonged to the Great Court Cards. The Twos and Threes were found secretly taking the places specially reserved for the Fours

and Fives. Confusion had never been so confounded before.

Many spring seasons had come and gone in that Island of Cards. The Kokil, the bird of Spring, had sung its song year after year. But it had never stirred the blood as it stirred it now. In days gone by the sea had sung its tireless melody. But, then, it had proclaimed only the inflexible monotony of the Rule. And suddenly its waves were telling, through all their flashing light and luminous shade and myriad voices, the deepest yearnings of the heart of love!

VI

Where are vanished now their prim, round, regular, complacent features? Here is a face full of love-sick longing. Here is a heart beating wild with regrets. Here is a mind racked sore with doubts. Music and sighing, and smiles and tears, are filling the air. Life is throbbing; hearts are breaking; passions are kindling.

Every one is now thinking of his own appearance, and comparing himself with others. The Ace of Clubs is musing to himself that the King of Spades may be just passably good-looking. 'But,' says he, 'when I walk down the street you have only to see how people's eyes turn towards me.' The King of Spades is saying: 'Why on earth is that Ace of Clubs always straining his neck and strutting about like a peacock? He imagines all the Queens are dying of love for him, while the real fact is—' Here he pauses, and examines his face in the glass.

But the Queens were the worst of all. They began to spend all their time in dressing themselves

And the Prince passed the whole day alone, walking by the side of the surging sea. He carried in his mind that startled look, that shrinking gesture of the Queen, and his heart beat high with hope.

That night the serried, gaily-dressed ranks of young men and maidens waited with smiling faces at the Palace Gates. The Palace Hall was lighted with fairy lamps and festooned with the flowers of spring. Slowly the Queen of Hearts entered, and the whole assembly rose to greet her. With a jasmine garland in her hand, she stood before the Prince with downcast eyes. In her lowly bashfulness she could hardly raise the garland to the neck of the Mate she had chosen. But the Prince bowed his head, and the garland slipped to its place. The assembly of youths and maidens had waited her choice with eager, expectant hush. And when the choice was made, the whole vast concourse rocked and swayed with a tumult of wild delight. And the sound of their shouts was heard in every part of the Island, and by ships far out at sea. Never had such a shout been raised in the Kingdom of Cards before.

And they carried the Prince and his Bride, and seated them on the throne, and crowned them then and there in the Ancient Island of Cards.

And the sorrowing Mother Queen, on the far-off island shore on the other side of the sea, came sailing to her son's new kingdom in a ship adorned with gold.

And the citizens are no longer regulated according to the Rules, but are good or bad, or both, according to their *Ichcha*.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

immemorial. Older than memory. This word is derived from mediæval Latin " immemorialis ".

genii. Spirits or goblins of the famous tales known as *The Arabian Nights.* There is a Latin word " genius," meaning, originally, a spirit inhabiting a special place. It is from this word that the English common noun " genius " is taken. But in *The Arabian Nights* a completely different Arabic word is found, *viz.*, "jinn" with its feminine form "jinni." This was written in English as " genie " and confused with the word ' genius." The plural of " genie " when used in this sense is " genii " which is really the plural of the Latin word " genius."

precedent. Previous example. This word is related to the French "précéder," Latin "praecedere," meaning to go before.

intricate. Complicated. This word is related to the Latin "tricae," meaning tricks.

obsolete. Old-fashioned, antiquated. This word is related to the Latin " solere," meaning to be accustomed. Compare *obsolescent.*

stupendous. Terrific, huge. This word is related to the Latin "stupere," meaning to be amazed at.

vacuum. Space entirely empty of matter. This word is related to the Latin "vacuus." Compare *vacuous, vacuity.*

initiate. Introduce and teach, admit. This word is derived from the Latin "initiare." Compare *initiation, initiator.*

meditative. Thoughtful. This word is derived from the Latin "meditari." It may be compared with the Greek "medomai," meaning to think about.

luminous. Shining, or full of light. This word is derived from the Latin "luminosus," from "lumen," light.

monotony. Dullness. This word is derived from the Greek prefix "monos," meaning alone, sole, single, and the Greek "tonos," meaning tone.

complacent. Self-satisfied or too contented. This word is derived from the Latin root " placere," meaning to please.

murmuring. Making a gentle continuous sound. This word comes from the French " murmure " through the Latin " murmurare," meaning to murmur.

sackbuts. Old-fashioned bass trumpets. This word comes from the French "saquebute," derived probably from the Old Northern French "saqueboute," a hook for pulling a man off a horse. The word may have then been applied to the musical instrument from an accidental likeness in sounds.

primeval. Of the time when the world was first made. This word is derived from the Latin "primaevus," itself a combination of the words "primus," meaning first, and "aevum," meaning age.

serried. Shoulder to shoulder, crowded together. This word is the anglicised form of the French "serre," past participle of the verb "serrer," to close, from late Latin "serare."

THE HUNGRY STONES

My kinsman and myself were returning to Calcutta from our Puja trip when we met the man in a train. From his dress and bearing we took him at first for an up-country Mahomedan, but we were puzzled as we heard him talk. He discoursed upon all subjects so confidently that you might think the Disposer of All Things consulted him at all times in all that He did. Hitherto we had been perfectly happy, as we did not know that secret and unheard-of forces were at work, that the Russians had advanced close to us, that the English had deep and secret policies, that confusion among the native chiefs had come to a head. But our newly acquired friend said with a sly smile: "There happen more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are reported in your newspapers." As we had never stirred out of our homes before, the demeanour of the man struck us dumb with wonder. Be the topic ever so trivial, he would quote science, or comment on the *Vedas*, or repeat quatrains from some Persian poet; and as we had no pretence to a knowledge of science or the *Vedas* or Persian, our admiration for him went on increasing, and my kinsman, a theosophist, was firmly convinced that our fellow-passenger must have been supernaturally inspired by some strange 'magnetism' or 'occult power,' by an 'astral body' or something of that kind. He listened to the tritest saying that fell from the lips of our extraordinary companion with devotional rapture, and secretly took down notes of his conversation. I

fancy that the extraordinary man saw this, and was a little pleased with it.

When the train reached the junction, we assembled in the waiting-room for the connection. It was then 10 P.M., and as the train, we heard, was likely to be very late, owing to something wrong on the line, I spread my bed on the table and was about to lie down for a comfortable doze, when the extraordinary person deliberately set about spinning the following yarn. Of course, I could get no sleep that night.

When, owing to a disagreement about some questions of administrative policy, I threw up my post at Junagarh, and entered the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad, they appointed me at once, as a strong young man, collector of cotton duties at Barich.

Barich is a lovely place. The *Susta* 'chatters over stony ways and babbles on the pebbles,' tripping, like a skilful dancing girl, in through the woods below the lonely hills. A flight of 150 steps rises from the river, and above that flight, on the river's brim and at the foot of the hills, there stands a solitary marble palace. Around it there is no habitation of man—the village and the cotton mart of Barich being far off.

About 250 years ago the Emperor Mahmud Shah II. had built this lonely palace for his pleasure and luxury. In his days jets of rose-water spurted from its fountains, and on the cold marble floors of its spray-cooled rooms young Persian damsels would sit, their hair dishevelled before bathing, and, splashing their soft naked feet in the clear water of

the reservoirs, would sing, to the tune of the guitar, the *ghazals* of their vineyards.

The fountains play no longer; the songs have ceased; no longer do snow-white feet step gracefully on the snowy marble. It is but the vast and solitary quarters of cess-collectors like us, men oppressed with solitude and deprived of the society of women. Now, Karim Khan, the old clerk of my office, warned me repeatedly not to take up my abode there. 'Pass the day there, if you like,' said he, 'but never stay the night.' I passed it off with a light laugh. The servants said that they would work till dark, and go away at night. I gave my ready assent. The house had such a bad name that even thieves would not venture near it after dark.

At first the solitude of the deserted palace weighed upon me like a nightmare. I would stay out, and work hard as long as possible, then return home at night jaded and tired, go to bed and fall asleep.

Before a week had passed, the place began to exert a weird fascination upon me. It is difficult to describe or to induce people to believe; but I felt as if the whole house was like a living organism slowly and imperceptibly digesting me by the action of some stupefying gastric juice.

Perhaps the process had begun as soon as I set my foot in the house, but I distinctly remember the day on which I first was conscious of it.

It was the beginning of summer, and the market being dull I had no work to do. A little before sunset I was sitting in an arm-chair near the water's edge below the steps. The *Susta* had shrunk and sunk low; a broad patch of sand on the other side

glowed with the hues of evening; on this side the pebbles at the bottom of the clear shallow waters were glistening. There was not a breath of wind anywhere, and the still air was laden with an oppressive scent from the spicy shrubs growing on the hills close by.

As the sun sank behind the hill-tops a long dark curtain fell upon the stage of day, and the intervening hills cut short the time in which light and shade mingle at sunset. I thought of going out for a ride, and was about to get up when I heard a footfall on the steps behind. I looked back, but there was no one.

As I sat down again, thinking it to be an illusion, I heard many footfalls, as if a large number of persons were rushing down the steps. A strange thrill of delight, slightly tinged with fear, passed through my frame, and though there was not a figure before my eyes, methought I saw a bevy of joyous maidens coming down the steps to bathe in the *Susta* in that summer evening. Not a sound was in the valley, in the river, or in the palace, to break the silence, but I distinctly heard the maidens' gay and mirthful laugh, like the gurgle of a spring gushing forth in a hundred cascades, as they ran past me, in quick playful pursuit of each other, towards the river, without noticing me at all. As they were invisible to me, so I was, as it were, invisible to them. The river was perfectly calm, but I felt that its still, shallow, and clear waters were stirred suddenly by the splash of many an arm jingling with bracelets, that the girls laughed and dashed and spattered water at one another, that the feet of the fair swimmers tossed the tiny waves up in showers of pearl.

I felt a thrill at my heart—I cannot say whether

the excitement was due to fear or delight or curiosity. I had a strong desire to see them more clearly, but naught was visible before me. I thought I could catch all that they said if I only strained my ears; but however hard I strained them, I heard nothing but the chirping of the cicadas in the woods. It seemed as if a dark curtain of 250 years was hanging before me, and I would fain lift a corner of it tremblingly and peer through, though the assembly on the other side was completely enveloped in darkness.

The oppressive closeness of the evening was broken by a sudden gust of wind, and the still surface of the *Susta* rippled and curled like the hair of a nymph, and from the woods wrapt in the evening gloom there came forth a simultaneous murmur, as though they were awakening from a black dream. Call it reality or dream, the momentary glimpse of that invisible mirage reflected from a far-off world, 250 years old, vanished in a flash. The mystic forms that brushed past me with their quick unbodied steps, and loud, voiceless laughter, and threw themselves into the river, did not go back wringing their dripping robes as they went. Like fragrance wafted away by the wind they were dispersed by a single breath of the spring.

Then I was filled with a lively fear that it was the Muse that had taken advantage of my solitude and possessed me—the witch had evidently come to ruin a poor devil like myself making a living by collecting cotton duties. I decided to have a good dinner—it is the empty stomach that all sorts of incurable diseases find an easy prey. I sent for my cook and gave orders for a rich, sumptuous *moghlai* dinner, redolent of spices and *ghi*.

Next morning the whole affair appeared a queer fantasy. With a light heart I put on a *sola* hat like the sahibs, and drove out to my work. I was to have written my quarterly report that day, and expected to return late; but before it was dark I was strangely drawn to my house—by what I could not say—I felt they were all waiting, and that I should delay no longer. Leaving my report unfinished I rose, put on my *sola* hat, and startling the dark, shady, desolate path with the rattle of my carriage, I reached the vast silent palace standing on the gloomy skirts of the hills.

On the first floor the stairs led to a very spacious hall, its roof stretching wide over ornamental arches resting on three rows of massive pillars, and groaning day and night under the weight of its own intense solitude. The day had just closed, and the lamps had not yet been lighted. As I pushed the door open a great bustle seemed to follow within, as if a throng of people had broken up in confusion, and rushed out through the doors and windows and corridors and verandas and rooms, to make its hurried escape.

As I saw no one I stood bewildered, my hair on end in a kind of ecstatic delight, and a faint scent of *attar* and unguents almost effaced by age lingered in my nostrils. Standing in the darkness of that vast desolate hall between the rows of those ancient pillars, I could hear the gurgle of fountains plashing on the marble floor, a strange tune on the guitar, the jingle of ornaments and the tinkle of anklets, the clang of bells tolling the hours, the distant note of *nahabat*, the din of the crystal pendants of chandeliers shaken by the breeze, the song of *bulbuls* from the cages in the corridors, the cackle of

storks in the gardens, all creating round me a strange unearthly music.

Then I came under such a spell that this intangible, inaccessible, unearthly vision appeared to be the only reality in the world—and all else a mere dream. That I, that is to say, Srijut So-and-so, the eldest son of So-and-so of blessed memory, should be drawing a monthly salary of Rs. 450 by the discharge of my duties as collector of cotton duties, and driving in my dog-cart to my office every day in a short coat and *sola* hat, appeared to me to be such an astonishingly ludicrous illusion that I burst into a horse-laugh, as I stood in the gloom of that vast silent hall.

At that moment my servant entered with a lighted kerosene lamp in his hand. I do not know whether he thought me mad, but it came back to me at once that I was in very deed Srijut So-and-so, son of So-and-so of blessed memory, and that, while our poets, great and small, alone could say whether inside or outside the earth there was a region where unseen fountains perpetually played and fairy guitars, struck by invisible fingers, sent forth an eternal harmony, this at any rate was certain, that I collected duties at the cotton market at Barich, and earned thereby Rs. 450 per mensem as my salary. I laughed in great glee at my curious illusion, as I sat over the newspaper at my camp-table, lighted by the kerosene lamp.

After I had finished my paper and eaten my *moghlai* dinner, I put out the lamp, and lay down on my bed in a small side-room. Through the open window a radiant star, high above the Avalli hills skirted by the darkness of their woods, was

gazing intently from millions and millions of miles away in the sky at Mr. Collector lying on a humble camp-bedstead. I wondered and felt amused at the idea, and do not know when I fell asleep or how long I slept; but I suddenly awoke with a start, though I heard no sound and saw no intruder—only the steady bright star on the hill-top had set, and the dim light of the new moon was stealthily entering the room through the open window, as if ashamed of its intrusion.

I saw nobody, but felt as if some one was gently pushing me. As I awoke she said not a word, but beckoned me with her five fingers bedecked with rings to follow her cautiously. I got up noiselessly, and, though not a soul save myself was there in the countless apartments of that deserted palace with its slumbering sounds and waking echoes, I feared at every step lest any one should wake up. Most of the rooms of the palace were always kept closed, and I had never entered them.

I followed breathless and with silent steps my invisible guide—I cannot now say where. What endless dark and narrow passages, what long corridors, what silent and solemn audience-chambers and close secret cells I crossed!

Though I could not see my fair guide, her form was not invisible to my mind's eye,—an Arab girl, her arms, hard and smooth as marble, visible through her loose sleeves, a thin veil falling on her face from the fringe of her cap, and a curved dagger at her waist! Methought that one of the thousand and one Arabian Nights had been wafted to me from the world of romance, and that at the dead of night I was wending my way through the dark narrow alleys

of slumbering Bagdad to a trysting-place fraught with peril.

At last my fair guide stopped abruptly before a deep blue screen, and seemed to point to something below. There was nothing there, but a sudden dread froze the blood in my heart—methought I saw there on the floor at the foot of the screen a terrible negro eunuch dressed in rich brocade, sitting and dozing with outstretched legs, with a naked sword on his lap. My fair guide lightly tripped over his legs and held up a fringe of the screen. I could catch a glimpse of a part of the room spread with a Persian carpet—some one was sitting inside on a bed—I could not see her, but only caught a glimpse of two exquisite feet in gold-embroidered slippers, hanging out from loose saffron-coloured *paijamas* and placed idly on the orange-coloured velvet carpet. On one side there was a bluish crystal tray on which a few apples, pears, oranges, and bunches of grapes in plenty, two small cups, and a gold-tinted decanter were evidently awaiting the guest. A fragrant intoxicating vapour, issuing from a strange sort of incense that burned within, almost overpowered my senses.

As with trembling heart I made an attempt to step across the outstretched legs of the eunuch, he woke up suddenly with a start, and the sword fell from his lap with a sharp clang on the marble floor.

A terrific scream made me jump, and I saw I was sitting on that camp-bedstead of mine sweating heavily; and the crescent moon looked pale in the morning light like a weary sleepless patient at dawn; and our crazy Meher Ali was crying out, as is his

daily custom, 'Stand back! Stand back! !' while he went along the lonely road.

Such was the abrupt close of one of my Arabian Nights; but there were yet a thousand nights left.

Then followed a great discord between my days and nights. During the day I would go to my work worn and tired, cursing the bewitching night and her empty dreams, but as night came my daily life with its bonds and shackles of work would appear a petty, false, ludicrous vanity.

After nightfall I was caught and overwhelmed in the snare of a strange intoxication. I would then be transformed into some unknown personage of a bygone age, playing my part in unwritten history; and my short English coat and tight breeches did not suit me in the least. With a red velvet cap on my head, loose *paijamas*, an embroidered vest, a long flowing silk gown, and coloured handkerchiefs scented with *attar*, I would complete my elaborate toilet, sit on a high-cushioned chair, and replace my cigarette with a many-coiled *narghileh* filled with rose-water, as if in eager expectation of a strange meeting with the beloved one.

I have no power to describe the marvellous incidents that unfolded themselves as the gloom of the night deepened. I felt as if in the curious apartments of the vast edifice the fragments of a beautiful story, which I could follow for some distance, but of which I could never see the end, flew about in a sudden gust of the vernal breeze. And all the same I would wander from room to room in pursuit of them the whole night long.

Amid the eddy of these dream-fragments, amid the smell of henna and the twanging of the guitar,

amid the waves of air charged with fragrant spray, I would catch like a flash of lightning the momentary glimpse of a fair damsel. She it was who had saffron-coloured *paijamas*, white ruddy soft feet in gold-embroidered slippers with curved toes, a close-fitting bodice wrought with gold, a red cap, from which a golden frill fell on her snowy brow and cheeks.

She had maddened me. In pursuit of her I wandered from room to room, from path to path among the bewildering maze of alleys in the enchanted dreamland of the nether world of sleep.

Sometimes in the evening, while arraying myself carefully as a prince of the blood-royal before a large mirror, with a candle burning on either side, I would see a sudden reflection of the Persian beauty by the side of my own. A swift turn of her neck, a quick eager glance of intense passion and pain glowing in her large dark eyes, just a suspicion of speech on her dainty red lips, her figure, fair and slim, crowned with youth like a blossoming creeper, quickly uplifted in her graceful tilting gait, a dazzling flash of pain and craving and ecstasy, a smile and a glance and a blaze of jewels and silk, and she melted away. A wild gust of wind, laden with all the fragrance of hills and woods, would put out my light, and I would fling aside my dress and lie down on my bed, my eyes closed and my body thrilling with delight, and there around me in the breeze, amid all the perfume of the woods and hills, floated through the silent gloom many a caress and many a kiss and many a tender touch of hands, and gentle murmurs in my ears, and fragrant breaths on my brow; or a sweetly-perfumed kerchief was wafted again and again on my cheeks. Then slowly a mysterious serpent

would twist her stupefying coils about me; and heaving a heavy sigh, I would lapse into insensibility, and then into a profound slumber.

One evening I decided to go out on my horse —I do not know who implored me to stay—but I would listen to no entreaties that day. My English hat and coat were resting on a rack, and I was about to take them down when a sudden whirlwind, crested with the sands of the *Susta* and the dead leaves of the Avalli hills, caught them up, and whirled them round and round, while a loud peal of merry laughter rose higher and higher, striking all the chords of mirth till it died away in the land of sunset.

I could not go out for my ride, and the next day I gave up my queer English coat and hat for good.

That day again at dead of night I heard the stifled heart-breaking sobs of some one—as if below the bed, below the floor, below the stony foundation of that gigantic palace, from the depths of a dark damp grave, a voice piteously cried and implored me: 'Oh, rescue me! Break through these doors of hard illusion, deathlike slumber and fruitless dreams, place me by your side on the saddle, press me to your heart, and, riding through hills and woods and across the river, take me to the warm radiance of your sunny rooms above!'

Who am I? Oh, how can I rescue thee? What drowning beauty, what incarnate passion shall I drag to the shore from this wild eddy of dreams? O lovely ethereal apparition! Where didst thou flourish and when? By what cool spring, under the shade of what date-groves, wast thou born—in the lap of what homeless wanderer in the desert? What Bedouin snatched thee from thy mother's arms, an

opening bud plucked from a wild creeper, placed thee on a horse swift as lightning, crossed the burning sands, and took thee to the slave-market of what royal city? And there, what officer of the Badshah, seeing the glory of thy bashful blossoming youth, paid for thee in gold, placed thee in a golden palanquin, and offered thee as a present for the seraglio of his master? And O, the history of that place! The music of the *sareng*, the jingle of anklets, the occasional flash of daggers and the glowing wine of Shiraz poison, and the piercing flashing glance! What infinite grandeur, what endless servitude! The slave-girls to thy right and left waved the *chamar*, as diamonds flashed from their bracelets; the Badshah, the king of kings, fell on his knees at thy snowy feet in bejewelled shoes, and outside the terrible Abyssinian eunuch, looking like a messenger of death, but clothed like an angel, stood with a naked sword in his hand! Then, O, thou flower of the desert, swept away by the blood-stained dazzling ocean of grandeur, with its foam of jealousy, its rocks and shoals of intrigue, on what shore of cruel death wast thou cast, or in what other land more splendid and more cruel?

Suddenly at this moment that crazy Meher Ali screamed out: 'Stand back! Stand back!! All is false! All is false!!' I opened my eyes and saw that it was already light. My *chaprasi* came and handed me my letters, and the cook waited with a *salam* for my orders.

I said: 'No, I can stay here no longer.' That very day I packed up, and moved to my office. Old Karim Khan smiled a little as he saw me. I felt nettled, but said nothing, and fell to my work.

As evening approached I grew absent-minded; I felt as if I had an appointment to keep; and the work of examining the cotton accounts seemed wholly useless; even the *Nizamat* of the Nizam did not appear to be of much worth. Whatever belonged to the present, whatever was moving and acting and working for bread seemed trivial, meaningless and contemptible.

I threw my pen down, closed my ledgers, got into my dog-cart, and drove away. I noticed that it stopped of itself at the gate of the marble palace just at the hour of twilight. With quick steps I climbed the stairs, and entered the room.

A heavy silence was reigning within. The dark rooms were looking sullen as if they had taken offence. My heart was full of contrition, but there was no one to whom I could lay it bare, or of whom I could ask forgiveness. I wandered about the dark rooms with a vacant mind. I wished I had a guitar to which I could sing to the unknown: 'O fire, the poor moth that made a vain effort to fly away has come back to thee! Forgive it but this once, burn its wings and consume it in thy flame!'

Suddenly two tear-drops fell from overhead on my brow. Dark masses of clouds overcast the top of the Avalli hills that day. The gloomy woods and the sooty waters of the *Susta* were waiting in terrible suspense and in an ominous calm. Suddenly land, water, and sky shivered, and a wild tempest-blast rushed howling through the distant pathless woods, showing its lightning-teeth like a raving maniac who had broken his chains. The desolate halls of the

palace banged their doors, and moaned in the bitterness of anguish.

The servants were all in the office, and there was no one to light the lamps. The night was cloudy and moonless. In the dense gloom within I could distinctly feel that a woman was lying on her face on the carpet below the bed—clasping and tearing her long dishevelled hair with desperate fingers. Blood was trickling down her fair brow, and she was now laughing a hard, harsh, mirthless laugh, now bursting into violent wringing sobs, now rending her bodice and striking at her bare bosom, as the wind roared in through the open window, and the rain poured in torrents and soaked her through and through.

All night there was no cessation of the storm or of the passionate cry. I wandered from room to room in the dark, with unavailing sorrow. Whom could I console when no one was by? Whose was this intense agony of sorrow? Whence arose this inconsolable grief?

And the madman cried out: 'Stand back! Stand back!! All is false! All is false!!'

I saw that the day had dawned, and Meher Ali was going round and round the palace with his usual cry in that dreadful weather. Suddenly it came to me that perhaps he also had once lived in that house, and that, though he had gone mad, he came there every day, and went round and round, fascinated by the weird spell cast by the marble demon.

Despite the storm and rain I ran to him and asked: 'Ho, Meher Ali, what is false?'

The man answered nothing, but pushing me aside went round and round with his frantic cry, like a

bird flying fascinated about the jaws of a snake, and made a desperate effort to warn himself by repeating: 'Stand back! Stand back!! All is false! All is false!!'

I ran like a madman through the pelting rain to my office, and asked Karim Khan: 'Tell me the meaning of all this!'

What I gathered from that old man was this: That at one time countless unrequited passions and unsatisfied longings and lurid flames of wild blazing pleasure raged within that palace, and that the curse of all the heart-aches and blasted hopes had made its every stone thirsty and hungry, eager to swallow up like a famished ogress any living man who might chance to approach. Not one of those who lived there for three consecutive nights could escape these cruel jaws, save Meher Ali, who had escaped at the cost of his reason.

I asked: 'Is there no means whatever of my release?' The old man said: 'There is only one means and that is very difficult. I will tell you what it is, but first you must hear the history of a young Persian girl who once lived in that pleasure-dome. A stranger or a more bitterly heart-rending tragedy was never enacted on this earth.'

Just at this moment the coolies announced that the train was coming. So soon? We hurriedly packed up our luggage, as the train steamed in. An English gentleman, apparently just aroused from slumber, was looking out of a first-class carriage endeavouring to read the name of the station. As soon as he caught sight of our fellow-passenger, he cried, 'Hallo,' and took him into his own compartment.

As we got into a second-class carriage, we had no chance of finding out who the man was nor what was the end of his story.

I said: 'The man evidently took us for fools and imposed upon us out of fun. The story is pure fabrication from start to finish.' The discussion that followed ended in a lifelong rupture between my theosophist kinsman and myself.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

topic. Subject. This word came into English from Latin, but is ultimately derived from the Greek "topika," meaning topics, from "topos," place.

quatrain. A verse of four lines with alternate rhymes. This word is related to the French "quatre," meaning four, which is itself derived from the Latin "quattuor."

astral. Having to do with the stars. The astral body is the spiritual likeness of the human form. This word is derived from the Latin "astrum," meaning star.

jet. Stream of liquid forced from a small opening. This word is derived from the French "jeter," to throw, and is related to late Latin "jectare."

cess. A tax. Now replaced by "rate" in England, but still used with varying meanings in Ireland, Scotland and India. It should really be spelt "sess" as it is related to the word "assess," derived from Old French "assesser."

weird. Strange or supernatural. This is an interesting word, related to the Old English noun " wyrd," meaning fate or destiny, and to the Old English verb "weordhan," meaning to become or to befall.

intervening. This word comes from the Latin "venire," meaning to come, and "inter," meaning between.

cascade. Fountain, waterfall. This word came into English through French from the Italian "cascata."

mirage. Something seen which is not really there, as when travellers in the desert imagine they see water and palm trees not far away. The word came into English from the French "(se) mirer," meaning to look at oneself in the mirror or to be reflected, and is ultimately derived from the Latin "mirari," meaning to wonder at. This is one of the words in English which keep the old French accent on the last syllable.

fantasy. Unreal mental picture. This word came into English from the Old French "fantasie," and is related to the Greek "phantasia."

chandelier. Branched hanging support for a number of lights. This word comes from the Old French "chandelier," related to the Latin, "candela." In English, therefore, both words exist—"candle" derived directly from Latin, and "chandelier" derived from the same Latin root, but coming into the language through French.

ludicrous. Amusing, ridiculous. This word comes from the Latin "ludicrus," probably from "ludicrum," meaning stage-play.

trysting-place. An appointed meeting-place, especially for lovers. The word tryst probably comes from the Old French "tristre," meaning a position to watch when hunting, and is probably of Scandinavian origin.

palanquin. A covered litter for one person. This word came into English from the Portuguese "palanquin." Compare the word "palangki" in Malay and "palki" in Hindustani.

RAJA AND RANI

BIPIN KISORE was born 'with a golden spoon in his mouth;' hence he knew how to squander money twice as well as how to earn it. The natural result was that he could not live long in the house where he was born.

He was a delicate young man of comely appearance, an adept in music, a fool in business, and unfit for life's handicap. He rolled along life's road like the wheel of Jagannath's car. He could not long command his wonted style of magnificent living.

Luckily, however, Raja Chittaranjan, having got back his property from the Court of Wards, was intent upon organising an Amateur Theatre Party. Captivated by the prepossessing looks of Bipin Kisore and his musical endowments, the Raja gladly 'admitted him of his crew.'

Chittaranjan was a B.A. He was not given to any excesses. Though the son of a rich man, he used to dine and sleep at appointed hours and even at appointed places. And he suddenly became enamoured of Bipin like one unto drink. Often did meals cool and nights grow old while he listened to Bipin and discussed with him the merits of operatic compositions. The Dewan remarked that the only blemish in the otherwise perfect character of his master was his inordinate fondness for Bipin Kisore.

Rani Basanta Kumari raved at her husband, and said that he was wasting himself on a luckless baboon. The sooner she could do away with him, the easier she would feel.

The Raja was much pleased in his heart at this seeming jealousy of his youthful wife. He smiled, and thought that women-folk know only one man upon the earth—him whom they love; and never think of other men's deserts. That there may be many whose merits deserve regard, is not recorded in the scriptures of women. The only good man and the only object of a woman's favours is he who has blabbered into her ears the matrimonial incantations. A little moment behind the usual hour of her husband's meals is a world of anxiety to her, but she never cares a brass button if her husband's dependents have a mouthful or not. This inconsiderate partiality of the softer sex might be cavilled at, but to Chittaranjan it did not seem unpleasant. Thus, he would often indulge in hyperbolic laudations of Bipin in his wife's presence, just to provoke a display of her delightful fulminations.

But what was sport to the 'royal' couple, was death to poor Bipin. The servants of the house, as is their wont, took their cue from the Rani's apathetic and wilful neglect of the wretched hanger-on, and grew more apathetic and wilful still. They contrived to forget to look after his comforts, to Bipin's infinite chagrin and untold suffering.

Once the Rani rebuked the servant Puté, and said: 'You are always shirking work; what do you do all through the day?' 'Pray, madam, the whole day is taken up in serving Bipin Babu under the Maharaja's orders,' stammered the poor valet.

The Rani retorted: 'Your Bipin Babu is a great Nawab, eh?' This was enough for Puté. He took the hint. From the very next day he left Bipin Babu's orts as they were, and at times forgot to cover the

food for him. With unpractised hands Bipin often scoured his own dishes and not infrequently went without meals. But it was not in him to whine and report to the Raja. It was not in him to lower himself by petty squabblings with menials. He did not mind it; he took everything in good part. And thus while the Raja's favours grew, the Rani's disfavour intensified, and at last knew no bounds.

Now the opera of *Subhadraharan* was ready after due rehearsal. The stage was fitted up in the palace courtyard. The Raja acted the part of 'Krishna,' and Bipin that of 'Arjuna.' Oh, how sweetly he sang! how beautiful he looked! The audience applauded in transports of joy.

The play over, the Raja came to the Rani and asked her how she liked it. The Rani replied: 'Indeed, Bipin acted the part of 'Arjuna' gloriously! He does look like the scion of a noble family. His voice is rare!' The Raja said jocosely: 'And how do I look? Am I not fair? Have I not a sweet voice?' 'Oh, yours is a different case!' added the Rani, and again fell to dilating on the histrionic abilities of Bipin Kisore.

The tables were now turned. He who used to praise, now began to deprecate. The Raja, who was never weary of indulging in high-sounding panegyrics of Bipin before his consort, now suddenly fell reflecting that, after all, unthinking people made too much of Bipin's actual merits. What was extraordinary about his appearance or voice? A short while before he himself was one of those unthinking men, but in a sudden and mysterious way he developed symptoms of thoughtfulness!

From the day following, every good arrange-

ment was made for Bipin's meals. The Rani told the Raja: 'It is undoubtedly wrong to lodge Bipin Babu with the petty officers of the Raj in the *Kachari;* for all he now is, he was once a man of means.' The Raja ejaculated curtly: 'Ha!' and turned the subject. The Rani proposed that there might be another performance on the occasion of the first-rice ceremony of the 'royal' weanling. The Raja heard and heard her not.

Once on being reprimanded by the Raja for not properly laying his cloth, the servant Puté replied: 'What can I do? According to the Rani's behests I have to look after Bipin Babu and wait on him the livelong day.' This angered the Raja, and he exclaimed, highly nettled: 'Pshaw! Bipin Babu is a veritable Nawab, I see! Can't he cleanse his own dishes himself?' The servant, as before, took his cue, and Bipin lapsed back into his former wretchedness.

The Rani liked Bipin's songs—they were sweet—there was no gainsaying it. When her husband sat with Bipin to the wonted discourses of sweet music of an evening, she would listen from behind the screen in an adjoining room. Not long afterwards, the Raja began again his old habit of dining and sleeping at regular hours. The music came to an end. Bipin's evening services were no more needed.

Raja Chittaranjan used to look after his *zemindari* affairs at noon. One day he came earlier to the zenana, and found his consort reading something. On his asking her what she read, the Rani was a little taken aback, but promptly replied: 'I am conning over a few songs from Bipin Babu's song-

book. We have not had any music since you tired abruptly of your musical hobby.' Poor woman! it was she who had herself made no end of efforts to eradicate the hobby from her husband's mind.

On the morrow the Raja dismissed Bipin—without a thought as to how and where the poor fellow would get a morsel henceforth!

Nor was this the only matter of regret to Bipin. He had been bound to the Raja by the dearest and most sincere tie of attachment. He served him more for affection than for pay. He was fonder of his friend than of the wages he received. Even after deep cogitation, Bipin could not ascertain the cause of the Raja's sudden estrangement. ''Tis Fate! all is Fate!' Bipin said to himself. And then, silently and bravely, he heaved a deep sigh, picked up his old guitar, put it up in the case, paid the last two coins in his pocket as a farewell *bakshish* to Puté, and walked out into the wide, wide world where he had not a soul to call his friend.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

wonted. Customary, usual. This word is from the Old English "gewunod" (past participle of "gewunian") which became "woned" in Middle English.

B.A. One of the degrees used originally in the mediaeval universities of Europe. It means Bachelor of Arts, the word "bachelor" being taken from its use in chivalry, when it stood for a young knight, not fully qualified or equipped. The "Master," also a university degree, meant a fully qualified person. The English brought the use of these terms into India.

incantation. Magical formula usually in verse; spell or charm. This word came into English from French, ultimately from Latin "cantare," meaning to sing. Cf. *chant, enchant.*

cavil. To object unreasonably. This word comes from Old French "caviller," and ultimately from the Latin "cavilla," meaning mockery.

chagrin. Disappointment and annoyance. This word comes from the French " chagrin " and ultimately from the Turkish "saghri," meaning the rump of a horse, or a prepared hide called shagreen. The sense in which we use the word has come by metaphor from the use of shagreen for friction in polishing.

orts. An archaic word from the fifteenth-century " ortys " and probably related to the Dutch " oor-aete," meaning remains of food. It is generally used in the plural.

jocose. Playful, teasing. This word comes from the Latin "jocus," meaning jest.

panegyrics. Speeches in praise of something or somebody. This word comes into English from Latin and Greek through the French "panégyrique."

eradicate. Remove or root out. This word is related to the Latin "radix," meaning root.

cogitation. Pondering, consideration. From the Latin "cogitare," meaning to think.

THE FUGITIVE GOLD

I

After his father's death, Baidyanath settled down on the proceeds of the Government stock which had been left to him. It never even occurred to him to look for work. His manner of spending time was to cut off branches of trees, and with minute care and skill he would polish them into walking-sticks. The boys and young men of the neighbourhood were candidates for these, and his supply of them never fell short of the demand.

By the blessing of the God of Fruition, Baidyanath had two boys and one daughter who had been given in marriage at the proper time.

But his wife Sundari bore a grievance against her lot, because there was not the same surplus in the resources of her husband as in those of their cousin across the road. The dispensation of Providence struck her as unnecessarily imperfect, when she could not show the same glitter of gold in her house, and tilt her nose as superciliously as her neighbour.

The condition of her own house gave her continual annoyance, where things were not only inconvenient but humiliating. Her bedstead, she was sure, was not decent enough to carry a corpse, and even an orphan bat who for seven generations had been without relatives would have scorned to accept an invitation within such dilapidated walls; while as for the furniture, why, it would have brought tears to the eyes of the most hardened of ascetics. It is im-

possible for a cowardly sex like man to argue against such palpable exaggerations, so Baidyanath merely retired on to his veranda, and worked with redoubled energy at polishing his walking-sticks.

But the rampart of silence is not the surest means of self-defence. Sometimes the wife would break upon her husband at his work, and, without looking at him, say: 'Please tell the milkman to stop delivering milk.'

At which Baidyanath, after his first shock of speechlessness, might possibly stammer out: 'Milk? How can you get on if you stop the supply? What will the children drink?'

To this his wife would answer: 'Rice water.'

On another day she would use quite the opposite method of attack, and, suddenly bursting into the room, would exclaim: 'I give it up, you manage your own household.'

Baidyanath would mutter in despair: 'What do you wish me to do?'

His wife would reply: 'You do the marketing for this month,' and then give him a list of materials sufficient for reckless orgies of feasting.

If Baidyanath could summon up courage to ask: 'What is the necessity of so much?' he would get the reply:

'Indeed it will be cheaper for you to let the children die of starvation, and me also for that matter.'

II

One day after finishing his morning meal Baidyanath was sitting alone, preparing the thread for a kite, when he saw one of those wandering mendicants

who are reputed to know the secret of transmuting the baser metals into gold. In a moment there flashed to his mind the surest chance of unearned increment to his funds. He took the mendicant into his house, and was surprised at his own cleverness when he secured the consent of his guest to teach him the art of making gold.

After having swallowed an alarming amount of nourishment, and a considerable portion of Baidyanath's paternal inheritance, the ascetic at last encouraged Baidyanath and his wife with the hope that the next day they would see their dream realised.

That night no one had any sleep. The husband and wife, with astounding prodigality, began to build golden castles in the air and discuss the details of the architecture. Their conjugal harmony was so unusually perfect for that night that in spite of disagreements they were willing to allow compromises in their plans for each other's sake.

Next day the magician had mysteriously disappeared, and with him the golden haze from the atmosphere in which they had been living. The sunlight itself appeared dark, and the house and its furniture seemed to its mistress to be four times more disgraceful than before.

Henceforth, if Baidyanath ventured even a truism on the most trifling of household matters, his wife would advise him with withering sarcasm to be careful of the last remnant of his intelligence after the reckless expenditure from which it had suffered.

Sundari in the meantime was showing her hand to every palmist that came her way, and also her horoscope. She was told that in the matter of children she would be fortunate, and that her house

would soon be filled with sons and daughters. But such prospect of overgrowth of population in her house did not produce any exhilaration in her mind.

At last one day an astrologer came and said that if within a year her husband did not come upon some hidden treasure, then he would throw his science to the winds and go about begging. Hearing him speak with such desperate certainty, Sundari could not entertain a moment's doubt as to the truth of his prophecy.

There are certain recognised methods for acquiring wealth, such as agriculture, service, trade, and the legal and illegal professions. But none of these points out the direction of hidden wealth. Therefore, while his wife spurred him on, it more and more perplexed him to decide upon the particular mound which he should excavate, or the part of the river-bed where he should send down a diver to search.

In the meantime the Puja Festival was approaching. A week before the day, boats began to arrive at the village landing laden with passengers returning home with their purchases: baskets full of vegetables, tin trunks filled with new shoes, unbrellas and clothes for the children, scents and soap, the latest story-books, and perfumed oil for the wives.

The light of the autumn sun filled the cloudless sky with the gladness of festival, and the ripe paddy fields shimmered in the sun, while the coconut leaves washed by the rains rustled in the fresh cool breeze.

The children, getting up very early, went to see the image of the goddess which was being prepared in the courtyard of the neighbouring house. When

it was their meal-time, the maid-servant had to come and drag them away by force. At that time Baidyanath was brooding over the futility of his own life, amidst this universal stir of merriment in the neighbourhood. Taking his two children from the servant, he drew them towards him, and asked the elder one: 'Well, Obu, tell me what do you want for a present this time?'

Obu replied without a moment's hesitation: 'Give me a toy boat, father.'

The younger one, not wishing to be behindhand with his brother, said: 'Oh, father, do give me a toy boat too.'

III

At this time an uncle of Sundari's had come to his house from Benares, where he was working as an advocate, and Sundari spent a great part of her time going round to see him.

At last one day she said to her husband: 'Look here, you will have to go to Benares.'

Baidyanath at once concluded that his wife had received from an astrologer a positive assurance of his impending death, and was anxious for him to die in that holy place, to secure better advantage in the next world.

Then he was told that at Benares there was a house in which rumour said there was some hidden treasure. Surely it was destined for him to buy that house and secure the treasure.

Baidyanath, in a fit of desperation, tried to assert his independence, and exclaimed: 'Good heavens, I cannot go to Benares.'

Two days passed, during which Baidyanath was

busily engaged in making toy boats. He fixed masts in them, and fastened sails, hoisted a red flag, and put in rudders and oars. He did not even forget steersmen and passengers to boot. It would have been difficult to find a boy, even in these modern times, cynical enough to despise such a gift. And when Baidyanath, the night before the festival, gave these boats to his boys, they became wild with delight.

On hearing their shouts Sundari came in, and at the sight of these gifts flew into a fury of rage, and, seizing the toys, threw them out of the window.

The younger child began to scream with disappointment, and his mother, giving him a resounding box on the ears, said: "Stop your silly noise.'

The elder boy, when he saw his father's face, forgot his own disappointment, and with an appearance of cheerfulness said: 'Never mind, father, I will go and fetch them first thing in the morning.'

Next day Baidyanath agreed to go to Benares. He took the children in his arms, and kissing them good-bye, left the house.

IV

The house at Benares belonged to a client of his wife's uncle, and for that reason perhaps the price was fairly high. Baidyanath took possession of it, and began to live there alone. It was situated right on the river-bank, and its walls were washed by the current.

At night Baidyanath began to have an eerie feeling, and he drew his sheet over his head, but could not sleep. When in the depth of night all was still he was suddenly startled to hear a clanking

sound from somewhere. It was faint but clear—as though in the nether regions the treasurer of the god Mammon was counting out his money.

Baidyanath was terrified, but with the fear there mingled curiosity and the hope of success. With trembling hand he carried the lamp from room to room, to discover the place where the sound had its origin, till in the morning it became inaudible among the other noises.

The next day at midnight the sound was hard again, and Baidyanath felt like a traveller in a desert, who can hear the gurgle of water without knowing from which direction it is coming, hesitating to move a step, for the fear of taking a wrong path and going farther away from the spring.

Many days passed in this anxious manner, until his face, usually so serenely content, became lined with anxiety and care. His eyes were sunk in their sockets, and had a hungry look, with a glow like that of the burning sand of the desert under the mid-day sun.

At last one night a happy thought came to him, and locking all the doors, he began to strike the floors of all the rooms with a crowbar. From the floor of one small room came a hollow sound. He began to dig. It was nearly dawn when the digging was completed.

Through the opening made Baidyanath saw that underneath there was a chamber, but in the darkness he had not the courage to take a jump into the unknown. He placed his bedstead over the entrance, and lay down. So morning came. That day, even in the day-time, the sound could be heard. Repeating the name of Durga, he dragged his bed-

stead away from the cavity in the floor. The splash of lapping water and the clank of metal became louder. Fearfully peeping through the hole into the darkness, he could see that the chamber was full of flowing water, which, when examined with a stick, was found to be about a couple of feet deep. Taking a box of matches and a lantern in his hand, he easily jumped into the shallow room. But lest in one moment all his hopes should collapse, his trembling hand found it difficult to light the lantern. After striking almost a whole box of matches, he at last succeeded.

He saw by its light a large copper cauldron, fastened to a thick iron chain. Every now and then, when the current came with a rush, the chain clanked against the side, and made the metallic sound which he had heard.

Baidyanath waded quickly through the water, and went up to this vessel, only to find that it was empty.

He could not believe his eyes, and with both hands he took the cauldron up and shook it furiously. He turned it upside down, but in vain. He saw that its mouth was broken, as though at one time this vessel had been closed and sealed, and some one had broken it open.

Baidyanath began to grope about in the water. Something struck against his hand, which on lifting he found to be a skull. He held it up to his ear, and shook it violently—but it was empty. He threw it down.

He saw that on one side of the room towards the river the wall was broken. It was through this opening that the water entered, and he felt

sure that it had been made by his unknown predecessor, who had a more reliable horoscope than his own.

At last, having lost all hope, he heaved a deep sigh, which seemed to mingle with the innumerable sighs of despair coming from some subterranean inferno of everlasting failures.

His whole body besmeared with mud, Baidyanath made his way up into the house. The world, full of its bustling population, seemed to him empty as that broken vessel and chained to a meaningless destiny.

Once more to pack his things, to buy his ticket, to get into the train, to return again to his home, to have to wrangle with his wife, and to endure the burden of his sordid days, all this seemed to him intolerably unreasonable. He wished that he could just slide into the water, as the broken-down bank of a river into the passing current.

Still he did pack his things, but his ticket, get into the train, and one evening at the end of a winter day arrive at his home.

On entering the house, he sat like one dazed in the courtyard, not venturing to go into the inner apartments. The old maid-servant was the first to catch sight of him, and at her shout of surprise the children came running to see him with their glad laughter. Then his wife called him.

Baidyanath started up as if from sleep, and once more woke into the life which he had lived before. With sad face and wan smile, he took one of the boys in his arms and the other by the hand and entered the room. The lamps had just been lighted, and although it was not yet night, it was a cold

evening, and everything was as quiet as if night had come.

Baidyanath remained silent for a little, and then in a soft voice said to his wife: 'How are you?'

His wife, without making any reply, asked him: 'What has happened?'

Baidyanath, without speaking, simply struck his forehead. At this Sundari's face hardened. The children, feeling the shadow of a calamity, quietly slipped away, and going to the maid-servant asked her to tell them a story.

Night fell, but neither husband nor wife spoke a word. The whole atmosphere of the house seemed to palpitate with silence, and gradually Sundari's lips set hard like a miser's purse. Then she got up, and leaving her husband went slowly into her bedroom, locking the door behind her. Baidyanath remained standing silently outside. The watchman's call was heard as he passed. The tired world was sunk in deep sleep.

When it was quite late at night the elder boy, wakened from some dream, left his bed, and coming out on to the veranda whispered: 'Father.'

But his father was not there. In a slightly raised voice he called from outside the closed door of his parents' bedroom, 'Father,' but he got no answer. And in fear he went back to bed.

Next morning early the maid-servant, according to her custom, prepared her master's tobacco, and went in search of him, but could find him nowhere.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

ascetic. A man who practises fasting and strict self-denial. This word comes from the Greek "asketes," meaning a monk.

veranda. Open platform along the side of a building, often with a light roof supported by pillars. This word comes from the Portuguese "varanda."

orgies. Excesses, debauches. This word comes from Greek "orgia" through Latin and French into English.

mendicant. Beggar. The word comes from the Latin "mendicus."

truism. An obvious truth or platitude. This word is a combination of true and -ism. The word "true" comes from Old English "tréowe."

horoscope. Plan showing the heavens at a particular moment, usually at a person's birth. This word comes into English through French and Latin from the Greek "horoscopos," combination of "hora," meaning time, and "skopos," meaning observer.

excavate. Dig out. This word is related to the Latin "cavus," meaning hollow. Compare *cavern*.

cynical. Churlish, sneering. This word came into English through Latin from the Greek "kunikos," a nickname for a Cynic, a philosopher of a sect founded by Antisthenes, marked by ostentatious contempt for pleasure.

eerie. Queer, peculiar. From Middle English "eri," but a word whose etymology is doubtful.

tobacco. This word comes from the Spanish "tabaco," of American native origin.

THE EDITOR

As long as my wife was alive, I did not pay much attention to Probha. As a matter of fact, I thought a great deal more about Probha's mother than I did of the child herself.

At that time my dealing with her was superficial, limited to a little petting, listening to her lisping chatter, and occasionally watching her laugh and play. As long as it was agreeable to me I used to fondle her, but as soon as it threatened to become tiresome I would surrender her to her mother with the greatest readiness.

At last, on the untimely death of my wife, the child dropped from her mother's arms into mine, and I took her to my heart.

But it is difficult to say whether it was I who considered it my duty to bring up the motherless child with twofold care, or my daughter who thought it her duty to take care of her wifeless father with a superfluity of attention. At any rate, it is a fact that from the age of six she began to assume the rôle of housekeeper. It was quite clear that this little girl constituted herself the sole guardian of her father.

I smiled inwardly but surrendered myself completely to her hands. I soon saw that the more inefficient and helpless I was, the better pleased she became. I found that even if I took down my own clothes from the peg, or went to get my own umbrella, she put on such an air of offended dignity that it was clear that she thought I had usurped her

right. Never before had she possessed such a perfect doll as she now had in her father, and so she took the keenest pleasure in feeding him, dressing him, and even putting him to bed. Only when I was teaching her the elements of arithmetic or the First Reader had I the opportunity of summoning up my parental authority.

Every now and then the thought troubled me as to where I should be able to get enough money to provide her with a dowry for a suitable bridegroom. I was giving her a good education, but what would happen if she fell into the hands of an ignorant fool?

I made up my mind to earn money. I was too old to get employment in a Government office, and I had not the influence to get work in a private one. After a good deal of thought I decided that I would write books.

If you make holes in a bamboo tube, it will no longer hold either oil or water, in fact its power of receptivity is lost; but if you blow through it, then, without any expenditure, it may produce music. I felt quite sure that the man who is not useful can be ornamental, and he who is not productive in other fields can at least produce literature. Encouraged by this thought, I wrote a farce. People said it was good, and it was even acted on the stage.

Once having tasted of fame, I found myself unable to stop pursuing it farther. Days and days together I went on writing farces with an agony of determination.

Probha would come with her smile, and remind me gently: 'Father, it is time for you to take your bath.'

And I would growl out at her: 'Go away, go away; can't you see that I am busy now? Don't vex me.'

The poor child would leave me, unnoticed, with a face dark like a lamp whose light has been suddenly blown out.

I drove the maid-servants away, and beat the men-servants, and when beggars came and sang at my door I would get up and run after them with a stick. My room being by the side of the street, passers-by would stop and ask me to tell them the way, but I would request them to go to Jericho. Alas, no one took it into serious consideration that I was engaged in writing a screaming farce.

Yet I never got money in the measure that I got fun and fame. But that did not trouble me, although in the meantime all the potential bridegrooms were growing up for other brides whose parents did not write farces.

But just then an excellent opportunity came my way. The landlord of a certain village, Jahirgram, started a newspaper, and sent a request that I would become its editor. I agreed to take the post.

For the first few days I wrote with such fire and zest that people used to point at me when I went out into the street, and I began to feel a brilliant halo about my forehead.

Next to Jahirgram was the village of Ahirgram. Between the landlords of these two villages there was a constant rivalry and feud. There had been a time when they came to blows not infrequently. But now, since the magistrate had bound them both over to keep the peace, I took the place of the hired ruffians who used to act for one of the rivals. Every

one said that I lived up to the dignity of my position.

My writings were so strong and fiery that Ahirgram could no longer hold up its head. I blackened with my ink the whole of their ancient clan and family.

All this time I had the comfortable feeling of being pleased with myself. I even became fat. My face beamed with the exhilaration of a successful man of genius. I admired my own delightful ingenuity of insinuation, when at some excruciating satire of mine, directed against the ancestry of Ahirgram, the whole of Jahirgram would burst its sides with laughter like an over-ripe melon. I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

But as last Ahirgram started a newspaper. What it published was starkly naked, without a shred of literary urbanity. The language it used was of such undiluted colloquialism that every letter seemed to scream in one's face. The consequence was that the inhabitants of both villages clearly understood its meaning.

But as I was hampered in my style by my sense of decency, my subtlety of sarcasm very often made but a feeble impression upon the power of understanding of both my friends and my enemies.

The result was that even when I won decidedly in this war of infamy my readers were not aware of my victory. At last in desperation I wrote a sermon on the necessity of good taste in literature, but found that I had made a fatal mistake. For things that are solemn offer more surface for ridicule than things that are truly ridiculous. And therefore my efforts at the moral betterment of my

fellow-beings had the opposite effect to that which I had intended.

My employer ceased to show me such attention as he had done. The honour to which I had grown accustomed dwindled in its quantity, and its quality became poor. When I walked in the street people did not go out of their way to carry off the memory of a word with me. They even went so far as to be frivolously familiar in their behaviour towards me—such a slapping my shoulders with a laugh and giving me nicknames.

In the meantime my admirers had quite forgotten the farces which had made me famous. I felt as if I was a burnt-out match, charred to its very end.

My mind became so depressed that, no matter how I racked my brains, I was unable to write one line. I seemed to have lost all zest for life.

Probha had now grown afraid of me. She would not venture to approach me unless summoned. She had come to understand that a commonplace doll is a far better companion than a genius of a father who writes comic pieces.

One day I saw that the Ahirgram newspaper, leaving my employer alone for once, had directed its attack on me. Some very ugly imputations had been made against myself. One by one all my friends and acquaintances came and read to me the spiciest bits, laughing heartily. Some of them said that however one might disagree with the subject-matter, it could not be denied that it was cleverly written. In the course of the day at least twenty people came and said the same thing, with slight variations to break its monotony.

In front of my house there is a small garden. I was walking there in the evening with a mind distracted with pain. When the birds had returned to their nests, and surrendered themselves to the peace of the evening, I understood quite clearly that amongst the birds at any rate there were no writers of journalism, nor did they hold discussions on good taste.

I was thinking only of one thing, namely, what answer I could make. The disadvantage of politeness is that it is not intelligible to all classes of people. So I had decided that my answer must be given in the same strain as the attack. I was not going to allow myself to acknowledge defeat.

Just as I had come to this conclusion, a well-known voice came softly through the darkness of the evening, and immediately afterwards I felt a soft warm touch in the palm of my hand. I was so distracted and absent-minded that even though that voice and touch were familiar to me, I did not realise that I knew them.

But the next moment, when they had left me, the voice sounded in my ear, and the memory of the touch became living. My child had slowly come near to me once more, and had whispered in my ear, 'Father,' but not getting any answer she had lifted my right hand, and with it had gently stroked her forehead, and then silently gone back into the house.

For a long time Probha had not called me like that, nor caressed me with such freedom. Therefore it was that to-day at the touch of her love my heart suddenly began to yearn for her.

Going back to the house a little later, I saw that

Probha was lying on her bed. Her eyes were half closed, and she seemed to be in pain. She lay like a flower which has dropped on the dust at the end of the day.

Putting my hand on her forehead, I found that she was feverish. Her breath was hot, and her pulse was throbbing.

I realised that the poor child, feeling the first symptoms of fever, had come with her thirsty heart to get her father's love and caresses, while he was trying to think of some stinging reply to send to the newspaper.

I sat beside her. The child, without speaking a word, took my hand between her two fever-heated palms, and laid it upon her forehead, lying quite still.

All the numbers of the Jahirgram and Ahirgram papers which I had in the house I burnt to ashes. I wrote no answer to the attack. Never had I felt such joy as I did, when I thus acknowledged defeat.

I had taken the child to my arms when her mother had died, and now, having cremated this rival of her mother, again I took her to my heart.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

rôle. Character, part in a play. This word recently came into English from the modern French "rôle." The English word "roll" was similarly borrowed from the Old French "rolle." The existence of both these words side by side in English, but with specialised meanings, shows how flexible this language is, and how readily it borrows and assimilates words from other languages at any stage.

usurped. Wrongfully taken. The word came into English from the Old French "usurper," from Latin "usurpare" ("usus," use "rapere," to snatch).

dowry. Money that a woman brings to her husband at her marriage. From Old French " douaire " and related to the English word " dower."

halo. Luminous circle of glory, as round the head of a saint. This word came into English through French from the Greek " halos," meaning the disk of the sun or moon.

urbanity. Refinement and style. This word comes from the Latin " urbanus," meaning of the city, refined, polished.

infamy. Here used to mean insult, reviling. The word comes from the mediæval Latin " infamosus," of ill-repute.

imputations. Accusations. This word came into English from the French "imputer" and ultimately from the Latin "imputare," meaning enter in the account.

THE VICTORY

She was the Princess Ajita. And the court poet of King Nārāyan had never seen her. On the day he recited a new poem to the king he would raise his voice just to that pitch which could be heard by unseen hearers in the screened balcony high above the hall. He sent up his song towards the star-land out of his reach, where, circled with light, the planet who ruled his destiny shone unknown and out of ken.

He would espy some shadow moving behind the veil. A tinkling sound would come to his ear from afar, and would set him dreaming of the ankles whose tiny golden bells sang at each step. Ah, the rosy-red tender feet that walked the dust of the earth like God's mercy on the fallen! The poet had placed them on the altar of his heart, where he wove his songs to the tune of those golden bells. Doubt never arose in his mind as to whose shadow it was that moved behind the screen, and whose anklets they were that sang to the time of his beating heart.

Manjari, the maid of the princess, passed by the poet's house on her way to the river, and she never missed a day to have a few words with him on the sly. When she found the road deserted, and the shadow of dusk on the land, she would boldly enter his room, and sit at the corner of his carpet. There was a suspicion of an added care in the choice of the colour of her veil, in the setting of the flower in her hair.

People smiled and whispered at this, and they

were not to blame. For Shekhar the poet never took the trouble to hide the fact that these meetings were a pure joy to him.

The meaning of her name was the *spray of flowers*. One must confess that for an ordinary mortal it was sufficient in its sweetness. But Shekhar made his own addition to this name, and called her the Spray of Spring Flowers. And ordinary mortals shook their heads and said, Ah, me!

In the spring songs that the poet sang, the praise of the spray of spring flowers was conspicuously reiterated; and the king winked and smiled at him when he heard it, and the poet smiled in answer.

The king would put him the question: 'Is it the business of the bee merely to hum in the court of the spring?'

The poet would answer: 'No, but also to sip the honey of the spray of spring flowers.'

And they all laughed in the king's hall. And it was rumoured that the Princess Ajita also laughed at her maid's accepting the poet's name for her, and Manjari felt glad in her heart.

Thus truth and falsehood mingle in life—and to what God builds man adds his own decoration.

Only those were pure truths which were sung by the poet. The theme was Krishna, the lover god, and Rādhā, the beloved, the Eternal Man and the Eternal Woman, the sorrow that comes from the beginning of time, and the joy without end. The truth of these songs was tested in his inmost heart by everybody from the beggar to the king himself. The poet's songs were on the lips of all. At the merest glimmer of the moon and the faintest whisper of the summer breeze his songs would

break forth in the land from windows and courtyards, from sailing-boats, from shadows of the wayside trees, in numberless voices.

Thus passed the days happily. The poet recited, the king listened, the hearers applauded, Manjari passed and repassed by the poet's room on her way to the river—the shadow flitted behind the screened balcony, and the tiny golden bells tinkled from afar.

Just then set forth from his home in the south a poet on his path of conquest. He came to King Nārāyan, in the kingdom of Amarapur. He stood before the throne, and uttered a verse in praise of the king. He had challenged all the court poets on his way, and his career of victory had been unbroken.

The king received him with honour, and said: 'Poet, I offer you welcome.'

Pundarik, the poet, proudly replied: "Sire, I ask for war."

Shekhar, the court poet of the king, did not know how the battle of the muse was to be waged. He had no sleep at night. The mighty figure of the famous Pundarik, his sharp nose curved like a scimitar, and his proud head tilted on one side, haunted the poet's vision in the dark.

With a trembling heart Shekhar entered the arena in the morning. The theatre was filled with the crowd.

The poet greeted his rival with a smile and a bow. Pundarik returned it with a slight toss of his head, and turned his face towards his circle of adoring followers with a meaning smile.

Shekhar cast his glance towards the screened balcony high above, and saluted his lady in his mind,

saying: 'If I am the winner at the combat to-day, my lady, thy victorious name shall be glorified.'

The trumpet sounded. The great crowd stood up, shouting victory of the king. The king, dressed in an ample robe of white, slowly came into the hall like a floating cloud of autumn, and sat on his throne.

Pundarik stood up, and the vast hall became still. With his head raised high and chest expanded, he began in his thundering voice to recite the praise of King Nārāyan. His words burst upon the walls of the hall like breakers of the sea, and seemed to rattle against the ribs of the listening crowd. The skill with which he gave varied meanings to the name Nārāyan, and wove each letter of it through the web of his verses in all manner of combinations, took away the breath of his amazed hearers.

For some minutes after he took his seat his voice continued to vibrate among the numberless pillars of the king's court and in thousands of speechless hearts. The learned professors who had come from distant lands raised their right hands, and cried, Bravo!

The king threw a glance on Shekhar's face, and Shekhar in answer raised for a moment his eyes full of pain towards his master, and then stood up like a stricken deer at bay. His face was pale, his bashfulness was almost that of a woman, his slight youthful figure, delicate in its outline, seemed like a tensely strung *vina* ready to break out in music at the least touch.

His head was bent, his voice was low, when he began. The first few verses were almost inaudible. Then he slowly raised his head, and his clear sweet voice rose into the sky like a quivering flame of fire.

He began with the ancient legend of the kingly line lost in the haze of the past, and brought it down through its long course of heroism and matchless generosity to the present age. He fixed his gaze on the king's face, and all the vast and unexpressed love of the people for the royal house rose like incense in his song, and enwreathed the throne on all sides. These were his last words when, trembling, he took his seat: 'My master, I may be beaten in play of words, but not in my love for thee.'

Tears filled the eyes of the hearers, and the stone walls shook with cries of victory.

Mocking this popular outburst of feeling, with an august shake of his head and a contemptuous sneer, Pundarik stood up, and flung this question to the assembly: 'What is there superior to words?' In a moment the hall lapsed into silence again.

Then with a marvellous display of learning, he proved that the Word was in the beginning, that the Word was God. He piled up quotations from scriptures, and built a high altar for the Word to be seated above all that there is in heaven and in earth. He repeated that question in his mighty voice: 'What is there superior to words?'

Proudly he looked around him. None dared to accept his challenge, and he slowly took his seat like a lion who had just made a full meal of its victim. The pandits shouted, Bravo! The king remained silent with wonder, and the poet Shekhar felt himself of no account by the side of this stupendous learning. The assembly broke up for that day.

Next day Shekhar began his song. It was of that day when the pipings of love's flute startled

for the first time the hushed air of the Vrinda forest. The shepherd women did not know who was the player or whence came the music. Sometimes it seemed to come from the heart of the south wind, and sometimes from the straying clouds of the hill-tops. It came with a message of tryst from the land of the sunrise, and it floated from the verge of sunset with its sigh of sorrow. The stars seemed to be the stops of the instrument that flooded the dreams of the night with melody. The music seemed to burst all at ance from all sides, from fields and groves, from the shady lanes and lonely roads, from the melting blue of the sky, from the shimmering green of the grass. They neither knew its meaning nor could they find words to give utterance to the desire of their hearts. Tears filled their eyes, and their life seemed to long for a death that would be its consummation.

Shekhar forgot his audience, forgot the trial of his strength with a rival. He stood alone amid his thoughts that rustled and quivered round him like leaves in a summer breeze, and sang the Song of the Flute. He had in his mind the vision of an image that had taken its shape from a shadow, and the echo of a faint tinkling sound of a distant footstep.

He took his seat. His hearers trembled with the sadness of an indefinable delight, immense and vague, and they forgot to applaud him. As this feeling died away Pundarik stood up before the throne and challenged his rival to define who was this Lover and who was the Beloved. He arrogantly looked around him, he smiled at his followers and then put the question again: 'Who is Krishna, the lover, and who is Rādhā, the beloved?'

Then he began to analyse the roots of those

names,—and various interpretations of their meanings. He brought before the bewildered audience all the intricacies of the different schools of metaphysics with consummate skill. Each letter of those names he divided from its fellow, and then pursued them with a relentless logic till they fell to the dust in confusion, to be caught up again and restored to a meaning never before imagined by the subtlest of wordmongers.

The pandits were in ecstasy; they applauded vociferously; and the crowd followed them, deluded into the certainty that they had witnessed, that day, the last shred of the curtains of Truth torn to pieces before their eyes by a prodigy of intellect. The performance of his tremendous feat so delighted them that they forgot to ask themselves if there was any truth behind it after all.

The king's mind was overwhelmed with wonder. The atmosphere was completely cleared of all illusion of music, and the vision of the world around seemed to be changed from its freshness of tender green to the solidity of a high road levelled and made hard with crushed stones.

To the people assembled their own poet appeared a mere boy in comparison with this giant, who walked with such ease, knocking down difficulties at each step in the world of words and thoughts. It became evident to them for the first time that the poems Shekhar wrote were absurdly simple, and it must be a mere accident that they did not write them themselves. They were neither new, nor difficult, nor instructive, nor necessary.

The king tried to goad his poet with keen glances, silently inciting him to make a final effort. But

Shekhar took no notice, and remained fixed to his seat.

The king in anger came down from his throne—took off his pearl chain and put it on Pundarik's head. Everybody in the hall cheered. From the upper balcony came a slight sound of the movements of rustling robes and waist-chains hung with golden bells. Shekhar rose from his seat and left the hall.

It was a dark night of waning moon. The poet Shekhar took down his MSS. from his shelves and heaped them on the floor. Some of them contained his earliest writings, which he had almost forgotten. He turned over the pages, reading passages here and there. They all seemed to him poor and trivial—mere words and childish rhymes!

One by one he tore his books to fragments, and threw them into a vessel containing fire, and said: 'To thee, to thee, O my beauty, my fire! Thou hast been burning in my heart all these futile years. If my life were a piece of gold it would come out of its trial brighter, but it is a trodden turf of grass, and nothing remains of it but this handful of ashes.'

The night wore on. Shekhar opened wide his windows. He spread upon his bed the white flowers that he loved, the jasmines, tuberoses and chrysanthemums, and brought into his bedroom all the lamps he had in his house and lighted them. Then mixing with honey the juice of some poisonous root, he drank it and lay down on his bed.

Golden anklets tinkled in the passage outside the door, and a subtle perfume came into the room with the breeze.

The poet, with his eyes shut, said: 'My lady,

have you taken pity upon your servant at last and come to see him?'

The answer came in a sweet voice: 'My poet, I have come.'

Shekhar opened his eyes—and saw before his bed the figure of a woman.

His sight was dim and blurred. And it seemed to him that the image made of a shadow that he had ever kept throned in the secret shrine of his heart had come into the outer world in his last moment to gaze upon his face.

The woman said: 'I am the Princess Ajita.'

The poet with a great effort sat up on his bed.

The princess whispered into his ear: 'The king has not done you justice. It was you who won at the combat, my poet, and I have come to crown you with the crown of victory.'

She took the garland of flowers from her own neck, and put it on his hair, and the poet fell down upon his bed stricken by death.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

reiterate. To repeat or say again and again. This word came into English from the Latin "iterare," from "iterum," meaning again.

numberless. Countless. This word comes through Old French "nombre" from the Latin "numerus," to which is added the suffix "less."

muse. The poet's goddess of inspiration. The word came into English through French and Latin from the Greek "Mousa," which is derived from the root "men—," "mon—," meaning, think, remember.

scimitar. Also spelt scimetar. Eastern curved sword. Related words are the Italian "scimitarra" and the French "cimeterre." The word is of Roman origin and is perhaps derived ultimately from the Persian "shamshir."

web. Design, as used figuratively here. The word comes from the Old English "webb" and may be compared to the Dutch "web" and the German "gewebe." The Old English verb "wefan" meant to weave.

vibrate. Throb, echo, quiver. The word came into English from the Latin "vibrare," meaning to shake or swing.

august. Imperious, haughty. This word came from the Latin "augustus," meaning consecrated, venerable. It is probably related to "augur," meaning soothsayer, someone who foretells the future.

consummation. Completion, wished-for end or achievement. This word came into English through the French "consommation" from the Latin "cosummatio," from "con," together, "summus," highest, utmost.

metaphysics. The theory of being and knowing. This word came into English through the mediæval Latin "metaphysica" from mediæval Greek "metaphusika," which is a combination of "ta meta ta phusika," the works which followed the *Physics* (of Aristotle).

wordmonger. Someone who deals in words. The second half of this word, "monger," comes from Old English "mangere" and is related to the Latin "mango," meaning dealer.

prodigy. Extraordinary event of person, particularly something apparently against the laws of nature. The word came into English from the Latin "prodigium," meaning portent, with an obvious change of sense.

to goad. To urge or stir into action. The word comes from the Old English "gad," related to the Lombard "gaida," meaning arrowhead, and thus the spiked stick used in driving cattle.

THE LOST JEWELS

My boat was moored beside an old bathing *ghāt* of the river, almost in ruins. The sun had set.

On the roof of the boat the boatmen were at their evening prayer. Against the bright background of the western sky their silent worship stood out like a picture. The waning light was reflected on the still surface of river in every delicate shade of colour from gold to steel-blue.

A huge house with broken windows, tumble-down verandas, and all the appearance of old age was in front of me. I sat alone on the steps of the *ghāt*, which were cracked by the far-reaching roots of a banyan tree. A feeling of sadness began to come over me, when suddenly I was startled to hear a voice asking: 'Sir, where have you come from?'

I looked up, and saw a man who seemed half-starved and out of fortune. His face had a dilapidated look such as is common among my countrymen who take up service away from home. His dirty coat of Assam silk was greasy and open at the front. He appeared to be just returning from his day's work, and to be taking a walk by the side of the river at a time when he should have been eating his evening meal.

The new-comer sat beside me on the steps. I said in answer to his question: 'I come from Ranchi.'

'What occupation?'

'I am a merchant.'

'What sort?'

'A dealer in cocoons and timber.'

'What name?'

After a moment's hesitation I gave a name, but it was not my own.

Still the stranger's curiosity was not satisfied. Again he questioned me: 'What have you come here for?' I replied: 'For a change of air.'

My cross-examiner seemed a little astonished. He said: 'Well, sir, I have been enjoying the air of this place for nearly six years, and with it I have taken a daily average of fifteen grains of quinine, but I have not noticed that I have benefited much.'

I replied: 'Still, you must acknowledge that, after Ranchi, I shall find the air of this place sufficient of a change.'

'Yes, indeed,' said he. 'More than you bargain for. But where will you stay here?'

Pointing to the tumble-down house above the *ghāt*, I said: 'There.'

I think my friend had a suspicion that I had come in search of hidden treasure. However, he did not pursue the subject. He only began to describe to me what had happened in this ruined building some fifteen years before.

I found that he was the schoolmaster of the place. From beneath an enormous bald head, his two eyes shone out from their sockets with an unnatural brightness in a face that was thin with hunger and illness.

The boatmen, having finished their evening prayer, turned their attention to their cooking. As the last light of the day faded, the dark and empty house stood silent and ghostly above the deserted *ghāt*.

The schoolmaster said: 'Nearly ten years ago,

when I came to this place, Bhusan Saha used to live in this house. He was the heir to the large property and business of his uncle Durga Saha, who was childless.

'But he was modern. He had been educated, and not only spoke faultless English, but actually entered sahibs' offices with his shoes on. In addition to that he grew a beard; thus he had not the least chance of bettering himself so far as the sahibs were concerned. You had only to look at him to see that he was a modernised Bengali.

'In his own home, too, he had another drawback. His wife was beautiful. With his college education on the one hand, and on the other his beautiful wife, what chance was there of his preserving our good old traditions in his home? In fact, when he was ill, he actually called in the assistant surgeon. And his style of food, dress, and his wife's jewels were all on the same extravagant scale.

'Sir, you are certainly a married man, so that it is hardly necessary to tell you that the ordinary female is fond of sour green mangoes, hot chillies, and a stern husband. A man need not necessarily be ugly or poor to be cheated of his wife's love; but he is sure to lose it if he is too gentle.

'If you ask me why this is so, I have much to say on this subject, for I have thought a good deal about it. A deer chooses a hardwood tree on which to sharpen its horns, and would get no pleasure in rubbing its horns against the soft stem of a plantain tree. From the very moment that man and woman became separate sexes, woman has been exercising all her faculties in trying by various devices to fascinate and bring man under her control. The wife

of a man who is, of his own accord, submissive is altogether out of employment. All those weapons which she has inherited from her grandmothers of untold centuries are useless in her hands: the force of her tears, the fire of her anger, and the snare of her glances lie idle.

'Under the spell of modern civilisation man has lost the God-given power of his barbaric nature, and this has loosened the conjugal ties. The unfortunate Bhusan had been turned out of the machine of modern civilisation an absolutely faultless man. He was therefore neither successful in business nor in his own home.

'Mani was Bhusan's wife. She use to get her caresses without asking, her Dacca muslin *saris* without tears, and her bangles without being able to pride herself on a victory. In this way her woman's nature became atrophied, and with it her love for her husband. She simply accepted things without giving anything in return. Her harmless and foolish husband used to imagine that to give is the way to get. The fact was just the contrary.

'The result of this was that Mani looked upon her husband as a mere machine for turning out her Dacca muslins and her bangles—so perfect a machine, indeed, that never for a single day did she need to oil its wheels.

'Though Bhusan's birthplace was Phulbere, here was his place of business, where, for the sake of his work, he spent most of his time. At his Phulbere house he had no mother, but had plenty of aunts and uncles and other relatives, from which distraction he brought away his wife to this house and kept her to himself alone. But there is this difference

between a wife and one's other possessions, that by keeping her to oneself one may lose her beyond recovery.

'Bhusan's wife did not talk very much, nor did she mix much with her neighbours. To feed Brahmans in obedience to a sacred vow, or to give a few pice to a religious mendicant, was not her way. In her hands nothing was ever lost; whatever she got she saved up most carefully, with the one exceptions of the memory of her husband's caresses. The extraordinary thing was that she did not seem to lose the least atom of her youthful beauty. People said that whatever her age was, she never looked older than sixteen. I suppose youth is best preserved with the aid of a heart that is an ice-box.

'But as far as work was concerned Mani was very efficient. She never kept more servants than were absolutely necessary. She thought that to pay wages to any one to do work which she herself could do was like playing the pickpocket with her own money.

'Not being anxious about any one, never being distracted by love, always working and saving, she was never sick nor sorry.

'For the majority of husbands this is quite sufficient,—not only sufficient, but fortunate. For the loving wife is a wife who makes it difficult for her husband to forget her, and the fatigue of perpetual remembrance wears out life's bloom. It is only when a man has lumbago that he becomes conscious of his waist. And lumbago in domestic affairs is to be made conscious, by the constant imposition of love, that you have such a thing as a wife. Exces-

sive devotion to her husband may be a merit for the wife but not comfortable for the husband,—that is my candid opinion.

'I hope I am not tiring you, sir? I live alone, you see; I am banished from the company of my wife, and there are many important social questions which I have leisure to think about, but cannot discuss with my pupils. In course of conversation you will see how deeply I have thought of them.'

Just as he was speaking, some jackals began to howl from a neighbouring thicket. The schoolmaster stopped for a moment the torrent of his talk. When the sound had ceased, and the earth and the water relapsed into a deeper silence, he opened his glowing eyes wide in the darkness of the night, and resumed the thread of his story.

'Suddenly a tangle occurred in Bhusan's complicated business. What exactly happened it is not possible for a layman like myself either to understand or to explain. Suffice it to say that, for some sudden reason, he found it difficult to get credit in the market. If only he could, by hook or by crook, raise a lakh and a half of rupees, and only for a few days rapidly flash it before the market, then his credit would be restored, and he would be able to sail fair again.

'But the money did not come easily. If the rumour got about that he was borrowing in the market where he was known, then he feared that his business would suffer even more seriously. So he began to cast about to see whether he could not raise a loan from some stranger. But, in that case, he would be bound to give some satisfactory security.

'The best security of all is jewelry, for that

saves the signing of all sorts of complicated documents. It not only saves time but is a simple process.

'So Bhusan went to his wife. But unfortunately he was not able to face his wife as easily as most men are. His love for his wife was of that kind which has to tread very carefully, and cannot speak out plainly what is in the mind; it is like the attraction of the sun for the earth, which is strong, yet which leaves immense space between them.

'Still, even the hero of a high-class romance does sometimes, when hard pressed, have to mention to his beloved such things as mortgage deeds and promissory notes. But the words stick, and the tune does not seem right, and the shrinking of reluctance makes itself felt. The unfortunate Bhusan was totally powerless to say: "Look here, I am in need of money; bring out your jewels."

'He did broach the subject to his wife at last, but with such extreme delicacy that it only excited her opposition without bending it to his own purpose. When Mani set her face hard, and said nothing, he was deeply hurt, yet he was incapable of returning the hurt back to her. The reason was that he had not even a trace of that barbarity which is the gift of the male. If any one had upbraided him for this, then most probably he would have expressed some such subtle sentiment as the following: "If my wife, of her own free choice, is unwilling to trust me with her jewelry, then I have no right to take them from her by force."

'Has God given to man such forcefulness only for him to spend his time in delicate measurement of fine-spun ideals?

'However this may be, Bhusan, being too proud to touch his wife's jewels, went to Calcutta to try some other way of raising the money.

'As a general rule in this world, the wife knows the husband far better than the husband ever knows the wife; but extremely modern men in their subtlety of nature are altogether beyond the range of those unsophisticated instincts which womankind has acquired through ages. These men are a new race, and have become as mysterious as women themselves. Ordinary men can be divided roughly into three main classes; some of them are barbarians, some are fools, and some are blind; but these modern men do not fit into any of them.

'So Mani called her counsellor for consultation. Some cousin of hers was engaged as assistant steward on Bhusan's estate. He was not the kind of man to profit himself by dint of hard work, but by help of his position in the family he was able to save his salary, and even a little more.

'Mani called him and told him what had happened. She ended up by asking him: "Now what is your advice?"

'He shook his head wisely and said: "I don't like the look of things at all." The fact is that wise men never like the look of things. Then he added: 'Babu will never be able to raise the money, and in the end he will have to fall back upon that jewelry of yours.'

'From what she knew of humanitv she thought that this was not only possible but likely. Her anxiety became keener than ever. She had no child to love, and though she had a husband she was almost unable

to realise his very existence. So her blood froze at the very thought that her only object of love, the wealth which like a child had grown from year to year, was to be in a moment thrown into the bottomless abyss of trade. She gasped: "What, then, is to be done?"

'Modhu said: "Why not take your jewels and go to your father's house?" In his heart of hearts he entertained the hope that a portion, and possibly the larger portion, of that jewelry would fall to his lot.

'Mani at once agreed. It was a rainy night towards the end of summer. At this very *ghāt* a boat was moored. Mani, wrapped from head to foot in a thick shawl, stepped into the boat. The frogs croaked in the thick darkness of the cloudy dawn. Modhu, waking up from sleep, roused himself from the boat, and said: "Give me the box of jewels."

'Mani replied: "Not now, afterwards. Now let us start."

'The boat started, and floated swiftly down the current. Mani had spent the whole night in covering every part of her body with her ornaments. She was afraid that if she put her jewels into a box they might be snatched away from her hands. But if she wore them on her person, then no one could take them away without murdering her. Mani did not understand Bhusan, it is true; but there was no doubt about her understanding of Modhu.

'Modhu had written a letter to the chief steward to the effect that he had started to take his mistress to her father's house. The steward was an ancient retainer of Bhusan's father. He was furiously angry, and wrote a lengthy epistle, full of misspellings, to

his master. Although the letter was weak in its grammar, yet it was forcible in its language, and clearly expressed the writer's disapproval of giving too much indulgence to womankind. Bhusan on receiving it understood what was the motive of Mani's secret departure. What hurt him most was the fact that, in spite of his having given way to the unwillingness of his wife to part with her jewels in this time of his desperate straits, his wife should still suspect him.

'When he ought to have been angry, Bhusan was only distressed. Man is the rod of God's justice, to him has been entrusted the thunderbolt of the divine wrath, and if at wrong done to himself or another it does not at once break out into fruy, then it is a shame. God has so arranged it that man, for the most trifling reason, will burst forth in anger like a forest fire, and woman will burst into tears like a rain-cloud for no reason at all. But the cycle seems to have changed, and this appears no longer to hold good.

'The husband bent his head, and said to himself: "Well, if this is your judgment, let it be so. I will simply do my own duty." Bhusan, who ought to have been born five or six centuries hence, when the world will be moved by psychic forces, was unfortunate enough not only to be born in the nineteenth century, but also to marry a woman who belonged to that primitive age which persists through all time. He did not write a word on the subject to his wife, and determined in his mind that he would never mention it to her again. What an awful penalty!

'Ten or twelve days later, having secured the necessary loan, Bhusan returned to his home. He

imagined that Mani, after completing her mission, had by this time come back from her father's house. And so he approached the door of the inner apartments, wondering whether his wife would show any signs of shame or penitence for the undeserved suspicion with which she had treated him.

'He found that the door was shut. Breaking the lock, he entered the room, and saw that it was empty.

'It seemed to him that the world was a huge cage from which the bird of love had flown away, leaving behind it all the decorations of the blood-red rubies of our hearts, and the pearl pendants of our tear-drops.

'At first Bhusan did not trouble about his wife's absence. He thought that if she wanted to come back she would do so. His old Brahmin steward, however, came to him, and said: "What good will come of taking no notice of it? You ought to get some news of the mistress." Acting on this suggestion, messengers were sent to Mani's father's house. The news was brought that up to that time neither Mani nor Modhu had turned up there.

'Then a search began in every direction. Men went along both banks of the river making inquiries. The police were given a description of Modhu, but all in vain. They were unable to find out what boat they had taken, what boatmen they had hired, or by what way they had gone.

'One evening, when all hope had been abandoned of ever finding his wife, Bhusan entered his deserted bedroom. It was the festival of Krishna's birth, and it had been raining incessantly from early morning. In celebration of the festival there was a fair

going on in the village, and in a temporary building a theatrical performance was being given. The sound of distant singing could be heard mingling with the sound of pouring rain. Bhusan was sitting alone in the darkness at the window there which hangs loose upon its hinges. He took no notice of the damp wind, the spray of the rain, and the sound of the singing. On the wall of the room were hanging a couple of pictures of the goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati, painted at the Art Studio; on the clothes-rack a towel, and a bodice, and a pair of *saris* were laid out ready for use. On a table in one corner of the room there was a box containing betel leaves prepared by Mani's own hand, but now quite dry and uneatable. In a cupboard with a glass door all sorts of things were arranged with evident care—her china dolls of childhood's days, scent bottles, decanters of coloured glass, a sumptuous pack of cards, large brightly polished shells, and even empty soap-boxes. In a niche there was a favourite little lamp with its round globe. Mani had been in the habit of lighting it with her own hands every evening. One who goes away, leaving everything empty, leaves the imprint of his living heart even on lifeless objects. Come, Mani, come back again, light your lamp, fill your room with light once more, and, standing before your mirror, put on your *sari* which has been prepared with such care. See, all your things are waiting for you. No one will claim anything more from you, but only ask you to give a living unity once more to these scattered and lifeless things, by the mere presence of your imperishable youth and unfading beauty. Alas, the inarticulate cry of these mute and lifeless objects

has made this room into a realm of things that have lost their world.

'In the dead of night, when the heavy rain had ceased, and the songs of the village opera troupe had become silent, Bhusan was sitting in the same position as before. Outside the window there was such an impenetrable darkness that it seemed to him as if the very gates of oblivion were before him reaching to the sky,—as if he had only to cry out to be able to recover sight of those things which seemed to have been lost for ever.

'Just as he was thinking thus, a jingling sound as of ornaments was heard. It seemed to be advancing up the steps of the *ghāt*. The water of the river and the darkness of the night were indistinguishable. Thrilling with excitement, Bhusan tried to pierce and push through the darkness with his eager eyes, till they ached,—but he could see nothing. The more anxious he was to see, the denser the darkness became, and the more shadowy the outer world. Nature, seeing an intruder at the door of her hall of death, seemed suddenly to have drawn a still thicker curtain of darkness.

'The sound reached the top step of the bathing *ghāt*, and now began to come towards the house. It stopped in front of the door, which had been locked by the porter before he went to the fair. Then upon that closed door there fell a rain of jingling blows, as if with some ornaments. Bhusan was not able to sit still another moment, but, making his way through the unlighted rooms and down the dark staircase, he stood before the closed door. It was padlocked from the outside, so he began to shake it with all his might. The force with which he

shook the door and the sound which he made woke him suddenly. He found he had been asleep, and in his sleep he had made his way down to the door of the house. His whole body was wet with sweat, his hands and feet were icy cold, and his heart was fluttering like a lamp just about to go out. His dream being broken, he realised that there was no sound outside except the pattering of the rain which had commenced again.

'Although the whole thing was a dream, Bhusan felt as if for some very small obstacle he had been cheated of the wonderful realisation of his impossible hope. The incessant patter of the rain seemed to say to him: "This awakening is a dream. This world is vain."

'The festival was continued on the following day, and the doorkeeper again had leave. Bhusan gave orders that the hall-door was to be left open all night, but the porter objected that there were all sorts of suspicious characters about who had come from other places to the fair, and that it would not be safe to leave the door open. But Bhusan would not listen, whereupon the porter said that he would himself stay on guard. But Bhusan refused to allow him to remain. The porter was puzzled, but did not press the point.

'That night, having extinguished the light, Bhusan took his seat at the open window of his bedroom as before. The sky was dark with rain-clouds, and there was a silence as of something indefinite and impending. The monotonous croaking of the frogs and the sound of the distant songs were not able to break that silence, but only seemed to add an incongruity to it.

'Late at night the frogs and the crickets and the boys of the opera party became silent, and a still deeper darkness fell upon the night. It seemed that now the time had come.

'Just as on the night before, a clattering and jingling sound came from the *ghāt* by the river. But this time Bhusan did not look in that direction, lest, by his over-anxiety and restlessness, his power of sight and hearing would become overwhelmed. He made a supreme effort to control himself, and sat still.

'The sound of the ornaments gradually advanced from the *ghāt*, and entered the open door. Then it came winding up the spiral staircase which led to the inner apartments. It became difficult for Bhusan to control himself, his heart began to thumb wildly, and his throat was choking with suppressed excitement. Having reached the head of the spiral stairs, the sound came slowly along the veranda towards the door of the room, where it stopped just outside with a clanking sound. It was now only just on the other side of the threshold.

'Bhusan could contain himself no longer, and his pent-up excitement burst forth in one wild cry of "Mani," and he sprang up from his chair with lightning rapidity. Thus startled out of his sleep, he found that the very window-panes were rattling with the vibration of his cry. And outside he could hear the croaking of the frogs and patter of rain.

'Bhusan struck his forehead in despair.

'Next day the fair broke up, and the stall-keepers and the players' party went away. Bhusan gave orders that that night no one should sleep in the house except himself. The servants came

to the conclusion that their master was going to practise some mystic rites. All that day Bhusan fasted.

'In the evening, he took his seat at the window of that empty house. That day there were breaks in the clouds, showing the stars twinkling through the rain-washed air. The moon was late in rising, and, as the fair was over, there was not a single boat on the flooded river. The villagers, tired out by two nights' dissipation, were sound asleep.

'Bhusan, sitting with his head resting on the back of his chair, was gazing up at the stars. He was thinking of the time when he was only nineteen years old, and was reading in Calcutta; how in the evening he used to lie in College Square, with his hands behind his head, gazing up at those eternal stars, and thinking of the sweet face of Mani in his father-in-law's house. The very separation from her was like an instrument whose tense-drawn strings those stars used to touch and waken into song.

'As he watched them, the stars one by one disappeared. From the sky above, and from the earth beneath, screens of darkness met like tired eyelids upon weary eyes. To-night Bhusan's mind was full of peace. He felt certain that the moment had come when his heart's desire would be fulfilled, and that Death would reveal his mysteries to his devotee.

'The sound came from the river *ghāt* just as on the previous nights and advanced up the steps. Bhusan closed his eyes, and sat in deep meditation. The sound reached the empty hall. It came winding up the spiral stairs. Then it crossed the long

veranda, and paused for a long while at the bedroom door.

'Bhusan's heart beat fast; his whole body trembled. But this time he did not open his eyes. The sound crossed the threshold. It entered the room. Then it went slowly round the room, stopping before the rack where the clothes were hanging, the niche with its little lamp, the table where the dried betel leaves were lying, the *almirah* with its various knick-knacks, and, last of all, it came and stood close to Bhusan himself.

'Bhusan opened his eyes. He saw by the faint light of the crescent moon that there was a skeleton standing right in front of his chair. It had rings on all its fingers, bracelets on its wrists and armlets on its arms, necklaces on its neck, and a golden tiara on its head,—in fact its whole body glittered and sparkled with gold and diamonds. The ornaments hung loosely on the limbs, but did not fall off. Most dreadful of all was the fact that the two eyes which shone out from the bony face were living—two dark moist eyeballs looking out with a fixed and steady stare from between the long thick eyelashes. As he looked his blood froze in his veins. He tried hard to close his eyes but could not; they remained open, staring like those of a dead man.

'Then the skeleton, fixing its gaze upon the face of the motionless Bhusan, silently beckoned with its outstretched hand, the diamond rings on its bony fingers glittering in the pale moonlight.

'Bhusan stood up, as one who had lost his senses, and followed the skeleton, which left the room, its bones and ornaments rattling with a hollow sound.

The skeleton crossed the veranda and, winding down the pitch-dark spiral staircase, reached the bottom of the stairs. Crossing the lower veranda, they entered the empty lampless hall and, passing through it, came out on to the brick-paved path of the garden. The bricks crunched under the tread of the bony feet. The faint moonlight struggled through the thick network of branches, and the path was difficult to discern. Making their way through the flitting fireflies, which haunted the dark shadowy path, they reached the river *ghāt*.

'By those very steps, up which the sound had come, the bejewelled skeleton went down step by step, with a stiff gait and hard sound. On the swift current of the river, flooded by the heavy rain, a faint streak of moonlight was visible.

'The skeleton descended to the river, and Bhusan, following it, placed one foot in the water. The moment he touched the water he woke with a start. His guide was no longer to be seen. Only the trees on the opposite bank of the river were standing still and silent, and overhead the half moon was staring as if astonished. Starting from head to foot, Bhusan slipped and fell headlong into the river. Although he knew how to swim, he was powerless to do so, for his limbs were not under his control. From the midst of dreams he had stepped, for a moment only, into the borderland of waking life—the next moment to be plunged into eternal sleep.'

Having finished his story, the schoolmaster was silent for a little. Suddenly, the moment he stopped, I realised that except for him the whole world had become silent and still. For a long time I also remained speechless, and in the darkness he

was unable to see from my face what was its expression.

At last he asked me: 'Don't you believe this story?'

I asked: 'Do you?'

He said: 'No; and I can give you one or two reasons why. In the first place, Dame Nature does not write novels, she has enough to do without—'

I interrupted him and said: 'And, in the second place, my name happens to be Bhusan Saha.'

The schoolmaster, without the least sign of discomfiture, said: "I guessed as much. And what was your wife's name?'

I answered: 'Nitya Kali.'

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

delicate. Fine, exquisite. This word comes from the Latin "delicatus," cognate or associated with "deliciae," meaning delight.

cocoon. The silky covering spun by a caterpillar or silkworm to protect it as a chrysalis. The word comes from the French "cocon," which is the diminutive form of "coque," meaning shell.

quinine. A drug used against malaria. This word came into English from the Spanish "quina," which is itself derived from the Peruvian "kina," meaning bark. The drug is prepared from the bark of the cinchona tree.

suspicion. Belief that something is wrong. The word came into English from the Anglo-French "suspecioun" from mediæval Latin "suspectio," from "suspicere" (" sub," below, "specere" to look).

faculties. Talents, abilities. This word came into English through the French "faculté," from Latin "facultas," related to "facilis," meaning easy.

atrophied. Wasted away through lack of nourishment. This word came into English through the French " atrophie " from Latin and ultimately from Greek " atrophia, " meaning ill-fed. In Greek the word was a combination of " a-, " meaning not, and " trophe, " meaning food.

bangles. Bracelets. The word came into English from the Hindustani " bangri. "

atom. Smallest particle, too small to be divided. The word came into English through the French " atome " from Latin and ultimately from Greek " atomos, " meaning indivisible. In Greek the word was a combination of " a-, " meaning not, and " tomos, " meaning cut.

lumbago. Rheumatism in the loins. The word is related to the Latin " lumbus, " meaning loin.

jackal. Wild animal similar to a dog and about the size of a fox. The word came into English from the Turkish " chakal," from the Persian "shagal," cognate with the Sanskrit " s'rgala. "

mortgage. A pledge or security for debt. The word came into English through the Old French " mortgage, " meaning dead pledge. The word is a combination of the word " mort " from Latin " mortuus, " meaning dead, and " gage, " meaning pledge.

dint. Force or means. The word comes from Old English " dynt, " meaning blow, and is related to the word dent.

salary. Regular payment. The word is of Anglo-French origin and comes from the Old French " salaire, " from the Latin " salarium, " meaning originally soldier's salt money.

cycle. Recurring sequence of events. The word came into English through Latin, from the Greek "kuklos," meaning circle.

penitence. Repentance, sorrow. This word came into English through the French " pénitence, " from the Latin " paenitere, " meaning to repent.

imprint. Mark, impression. The word came into English through Old French " empreinte, " from the Latin " impremere, " to press in.

troupe. Company. This word came into English from the French " troupe, " from Old French "trope," and ultimately from late Latin " troppus," meaning flock. The related word " troop "in English comes from the same French word, but is used in a slightly different sense.

obstacle. Hindrance. This word came into English from the Latin " obstaculum, " related to the word " obstare, " meaning to stand in the way, impede.

mystic. Secret, mysterious. This word came into English through Old French " Mystique " from Latin and ultimately from the Greek " mustikos." The Greek " muo " means to close lips or eyes.

skeleton. A complete structure of bones. This word is derived from the Greek " skeletos, " meaning dried-up.

MY FAIR NEIGHBOUR

My feelings towards the young widow who lived in the next house to mine were feelings of worship; at least, that is what I told to my friends and myself. Even my neartest intimate, Nabin, knew nothing of the real state of my mind. And I had a sort of pride that I could keep my passion pure by thus concealing it in the inmost recesses of my heart. She was like a dew-drenched *sephali*-blossom, untimely fallen to earth. Too radiant and holy for the flower-decked marriage-bed, she had been dedicated to Heaven.

But passion is like the mountain stream, and refuses to be enclosed in the place of its birth; it must seek an outlet. That is why I tried to give expression to my emotions in poems; but my unwilling pen refused to desecreate the object of my worship.

It happened curiously that just at this time my friend Nabin was afflicted with a madness of verse. It came upon him like an earthquake. It was the poor fellow's first attack, and he was equally unprepared for rhyme and rhythm. Nevertheless he could not refrain, for he succumbed to the fascination, as a widower to his second wife.

So Nabin sought help from me. The subject of his poems was the old, old one, which is ever new: his poems were all addressed to the beloved one. I slapped his back in jest, and asked him: 'Well, old chap, who is she?'

Nabin laughed, as he replied: 'That I have not yet discovered!'

I confess that I found considerable comfort in bringing help to my friend. Like a hen brooding on a duck's egg, I lavished all the warmth of my pent-up passion on Nabin's effusions. So vigorously did I revise and improve his crude productions, that the larger part of each poem became my own.

Then Nabin would say in surprise: 'That is just what I wanted to say, but could not. How on earth do you manage to get hold of all these fine sentiments?'

Poet-like, I would reply: 'They come from my imagination; for, as you know, truth is silent, and it is imagination only which waxes eloquent. Reality represses the flow of feeling like a rock; imagination cuts out a path for itself.'

And the poor puzzled Nabin would say: 'Y-e-s, I see, yes, of course'; and then after some thought would murmur again: 'Yes, yes, you are right!'

As I have already said, in my own love there was a feeling of reverential delicacy which prevented me from putting it into words. But with Nabin as a screen, there was nothing to hinder the flow of my pen; and a true warmth of feeling gushed out into these vicarious poems.

Nabin in his lucid moments would say: 'But these are yours! Let me publish them over your name.'

'Nonsense!' I would reply. 'They are yours, my dear fellow; I have only added a touch or two here and there.'

And Nabin gradually came to believe it.

I will not deny that, with a feeling akin to that of the astronomer gazing into the starry heavens, I did sometimes turn my eyes towards the window of the house next door. It is also true that now and again my furtive glances would be rewarded with a vision. And the least glimpse of the pure light of that countenance would at once still and clarify all that was turbulent and unworthy in my emotions.

But one day I was startled. Could I believe my eyes? It was a hot summer afternoon. One of the fierce and fitful nor'-westers was threatening. Black clouds were massed in the north-west corner of the sky; and against the strange and fearful light of that background my fair neighbour stood, gazing out into empty space. And what a world of forlorn longing did I discover in the far-away look of those lustrous black eyes! Was there then, perchance, still some living volcano within the serene radiance of that moon of mine? Alas! that look of limitless yearning, which was winging its way through the clouds like an eager bird, surely sought—not heaven—but the nest of some human heart!

At the sight of the unutterable passion of that look I could hardly contain myself. I was no longer satisfied with correcting crude poems. My whole being longed to express itself in some worthy action. At last I thought I would devote myself to making widow-remarriage popular in my country. I was prepared not only to speak and write on the subject, but also to spend money in its cause.

Nabin began to argue with me. 'Permanent widowhood,' said he, 'has in it a sense of immense purity and peace; a calm beauty like that of the

silent places of the dead shimmering in the wan light of the eleventh moon. Would not the mere possibility of remarriage destroy its divine beauty?'

Now this sort of sentimentality always makes me furious. In time of famine, if a well-fed man speaks scornfully of food, and advises a starving man at point of death to glut his hunger on the fragrance of flowers and the song of birds, what are we to think of him? I said with some heat: 'Look here, Nabin, to the artist a ruin may be a beautiful object; but houses are built not only for the contemplation of artists, but that people may live therein; so they have to be kept in repair in spite of artistic susceptibilities. It is all very well for you to idealise widowhood from your safe distance, but you should remember that within widowhood there is a sensitive human heart, throbbing with pain and desire.'

I had an impression that the conversion of Nabin would be a difficult matter, so perhaps I was more impassioned than I need have been. I was somewhat surprised to find at the conclusion of my little speech that Nabin after a single thoughtful sigh completely agreed with me. The even more convincing peroration which I felt I might have delivered was not needed!

After about a week Nabin came to me, and said that if I would help him he was prepared to lead the way by marrying a widow himself.

I was overjoyed. I embraced him effusively, and promised him any money that might be required for the purpose. Then Nabin told me his story.

I learned that Nabin's loved one was not an

imaginary being. It appeared that Nabin, too, had for some time adored a widow from a distance, but had not spoken of his feelings to any living soul. Then the magazines in which Nabin's poems, or rather *my* poems, used to appear had reached the fair one's hands; and the poems had not been ineffective.

Not that Nabin had deliberately intended, as he was careful to explain, to conduct love-making in that way. In fact, said he, he had no idea that the widow knew how to read. He used to post the magazine, without disclosing the sender's name, addressed to the widow's brother. It was only a sort of fancy of his, a concession to his hopeless passion. It was flinging garlands before a deity; it is not the worshipper's affair whether the god knows or not, whether he accepts or ignores the offering.

And Nabin particularly wanted me to understand that he had no definite end in view when on diverse pretexts he sought and made the acquaintance of the widow's brother. Any near relation of the loved one needs must have a special interest for the lover.

Then followed a long story about how an illness of the brother at last brought them together. The presence of the poet himself naturally led to much discussion of the poems; nor was the discussion necessarily restricted to the subject out of which it arose.

After his recent defeat in argument at my hands, Nabin had mustered up courage to propose marriage to the widow. At first he could not gain her consent. But when he had made full use of my eloquent words, supplemented by a tear or two of

his own, the fair one capitulated unconditionally. Some money was now wanted by her guardian to make arrangements.

'Take it at once,' said I.

'But,' Nabin went on, 'you know it will be some months before I can appease my father sufficiently for him to continue my allowance. How are we to live in the meantime?' I wrote out the necessary cheque without a word, and then I said: 'Now tell me who she is. You need not look on me as a possible rival, for I swear I will not write poems to her; and even if I do I will not send them to her brother, but to you!'

'Don't be absurd,' said Nabin; 'I have not kept back her name because I feared your rivalry! The fact is, she was very much perturbed at taking this unusual step, and had asked me not to talk about the matter to my friends. But it no longer matters, now that everything has been satisfactorily settled. She lives at No. 19, the house next to yours.'

If my heart had been an iron boiler it would have burst. 'So she has no objection to re-marriage?' I simply asked.

'Not at the present moment,' replied Nabin with a smile.

'And was it the poems alone which wrought the magic change?'

'Well, my poems were not so bad, you know,' said Nabin, 'were they?'

I swore mentally.

But at whom was I to swear? At him? At myself? At Providence? All the same, I swore.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

rhyme. Words which sound the same, *e.g.*, write, sight, usually at the end of a line of verse, are said to rhyme. This word came into English through the Old French " rime " from Latin and ultimately from the Greek " rhuthmos, " meaning rhythm.

rhythm. Regular movement of words, music or dancing. This word came into English through Latin from the Greek " rhuthmos. "

sentiments. Expressions of feeling. This word came into English from mediaeval Latin " sentimentum, " related to Latin " sentire, " to feel.

vicarious. In place of another. This word came into English from the Latin " vicarius, " meaning deputed, deputy. Compare *vicar*.

furtive. Done secretly. This word came into English through French from the Latin " furtivus, " related to the word " furtum, " meaning theft.

clarify. Clear up. This word came into English through Old French "clarifier" from the Latin " clarificare, " related to " clarus," meaning clear.

turbulent. Wild and whirling. This word came into English from the Latin " turbulentus, " related to " turba, " meaning tumult.

crude. Rough, unfinished. This word is derived from the Latin " crudus, " meaning raw.

divine. Sacred, heavenly. This word came into English through Old French " devin " from the Latin " divinus, " related to " divus " or " deus, " meaning god.

peroration. A concluding speech. This word is derived from the Latin " perorare, " related to " orare, " meaning to speak. Compare *oratory*.

magazines. Periodical publications. This word came into English from the French " magasin," from the Arabic " makhasia," plural form of "makhzan," meaning store-house, and related to the verb " khazana, " meaning to store up. Cf. *powder magazine*.

widow. Woman whose husband has died. This word is of Aryan origin and has been handed down from Old English " widewe, " related to Dutch " weduwe, " German " witwe, " and cognate with Latin "viduus," meaning bereaved, Greek, " eitheos, " meaning bachelor, and Sanskrit " vidhava. "

guardian. Someone who has legal charge of a person in place of the parents. This word comes from Old French " g(u)arden, " related to the word " garde, " guard.

poem. A metrical composition in words. The word came into English through French " poéme " from Latin and ultimately from the Greek " poema " or " poiema, " related to " poieo, " to make.

THE RENUNCIATION

I

It was a night of full moon early in the month of *Phalgun*. The youthful spring was everywhere sending forth its breeze laden with the fragrance of mango-blossoms. The melodious notes of an untiring *papiya*, concealed within the thick foliage of an old *lichi* tree by the side of a tank, penetrated a sleepless bedroom of the Mukerji family. There Hemanta now restlessly twisted a lock of his wife's hair round his finger, now beat her *churi* against her wristlet until it tinkled, now pulled at the chaplet of flowers about her head, and left it hanging over her face. His mood was that of an evening breeze which played about a favourite flowering shrub, gently shaking her now this side, now that, in the hope of rousing her to animation.

But Kusum sat motionless, looking out of the open window, with eyes immersed in the moonlit depth of never-ending space beyond. Her husband's caresses were lost on her.

At last Hemanta clasped both the hands of his wife, and, shaking them gently, said: 'Kusum, where are you? A patient search through a big telescope would reveal you only as a small speck—you seem to have receded so far away. O, do come closer to me, dear. See how beautiful the night is.'

Kusum turned her eyes from the void of space towards her husband, and said slowly: 'I know a *mantra* which could in one moment shatter this spring night and the moon into pieces.'

'If you do,' laughed Hemanta, 'pray don't utter it. If any *mantra* of yours could bring three or four Saturdays during the week, and prolong the nights till 5 P.M. the next day, say it by all means."

Saying this, he tried to draw his wife a little closer to him. Kusum, freeing herself from the embrace, said: 'Do you know, to-night I feel a longing to tell you what I promised to reveal only on my death-bed. To-night I feel that I could endure whatever punishment you might inflict on me.'

Hemanta was on the point of making a jest about punishments by reciting a verse from Jayadeva, when the sound of an angry pair of slippers was heard approaching rapidly. They were the familiar footsteps of his father, Harihar Mukerji, and Hemanta, not knowing what it meant, was in a flutter of excitement.

Standing outside the door Harihar roared out: 'Hemanta, turn your wife out of the house immediately.'

Hemanta looked at his wife, and detected no trace of surprise in her features. She merely buried her face within the palms of her hands, and, with all the strength and intensity of her soul, wished that she could then and there melt into nothingness. It was the same *papiya* whose song floated into the room with the south breeze, and no one heard it. Endless are the beauties of the earth—but alas, how easily everything is twisted out of shape.

II

Returning from without, Hemanta asked his wife: 'Is it true?'

'It is,' replied Kusum.

'Why didn't you tell me long ago?'

'I did try many a time, and I always failed. I am a wretched woman.'

'Then tell me everything now.'

Kusum gravely told her story in a firm unshaken voice. She waded barefooted through fire, as it were, with slow unflinching steps, and nobody knew how much she was scorched. Having heard her to the end, Hemanta rose and walked out.

Kusum thought that her husband had gone, never to return to her again. It did not strike her as strange. She took it as naturally as any other incident of everyday life—so dry and apathetic had her mind become during the last few moments. Only the world and love seemed to her as a void and make-believe from beginning to end. Even the memory of the protestations of love, which her husband had made to her in days past, brought to her lips a dry, hard, joyless smile, like a sharp cruel knife which had cut through her heart. She was thinking, perhaps, that the love which seemed to fill so much of one's life, which brought in its train such fondness and depth of feeling, which made even the briefest separation so exquisitely painful and a moment's union so intensely sweet, which seemed boundless in its extent and eternal in its duration, the cessation of which could not be imagined even in births to come—that this was that love! So feeble was its support! No sooner does the priesthood touch it than your 'eternal' love crumbles into a handful of dust! Only a short while ago Hemanta had whispered to her: "What a beautiful night!" The same night was not yet at an end, the same

papiya was still warbling, the same south breeze still blew into the room, making the bed-curtain shiver; the same moonlight lay on the bed next the open window, sleeping like a beautiful heroine exhausted with gaiety. All this was unreal! Love was more falsely dissembling than she herself!

III

The next morning Hemanta, fagged after a sleepless night, and looking like one distracted, called at the house of Peari Sankar Ghosal. 'What news, my son?' Peari Sankar greeted him.

Hemanta, flaring up like a big fire, said in a trembling voice: 'You have defiled our caste. You have brought destruction upon us. And you will have to pay for it.' He could say no more; he felt choked.

'And *you* have preserved my caste, prevented my ostracism from the community, and patted me on the back affectionately!' said Peari Sankar with a slight sarcastic smile.

Hemanta wished that his Brahmin-fury could reduce Peari Sankar to ashes in a moment, but his rage burnt only himself. Peari Sankar sat before him unscathed, and in the best of health.

'Did I ever do you any harm?' demanded Hemanta in a broken voice.

'Let me ask you one question,' said Peari Sankar. 'My daughter—my only child—what harm had she done your father? You were very young then, and probably never heard. Listen, then. Now, don't you excite yourself. There is much humour in what I am going to relate.

'You were quite small when my son-in-law Nabakanta ran away to England after stealing my daughter's jewels. You might truly remember the commotion in the village when he returned as a barrister five years later. Or, perhaps, you were unaware of it, as you were at school in Calcutta at the time. Your father, arrogating to himself the headship of the community, declared that if I sent my daughter to her husband's home, I must renounce her for good, and never again allow her to cross my threshold. I fell at your father's feet, and implored him, saying: "Brother, save me this once. I will make the boy swallow cow-dung, and go through the *prayaschittam* ceremony. Do take him back into caste." But your father remained obdurate. For my part, I could not disown my only child, and, bidding good-bye to my village and my kinsmen, I betook myself to Calcutta. There, too, my troubles followed me. When I had made every arrangement for my nephew's marriage, your father stirred up the girl's people, and they broke the match off. Then I took a solemn vow that, if there was a drop of Brahmin blood flowing in my veins, I would avenge myself. You understand the business to some extent now, don't you? But wait a little longer. You will enjoy it, when I tell you the whole story; it is interesting.

'When you were attending college, one Bipradas Chatterji used to live next door to your lodgings. The poor fellow is dead now. In his house lived a child-widow called Kusum, the destitute orphan of a Kayestha gentleman. The girl was very pretty, and the old Brahmin desired to shield her from the hungry gaze of college students. But for a young

girl to throw dust in the eyes of her old guardian was not at all a difficult task. She often went to the top of the roof, to hang her washing out to dry, and, I believe, you found your own roof best suited for your studies. Whether you two spoke to each other, when on your respective roofs, I cannot tell, but the girl's behaviour excited suspicion in the old man's mind. She made frequent mistakes in her household duties, and, like Parbati, engaged in her devotions, began gradually to renounce food and sleep. Some evenings she would burst into tears in the presence of the old gentleman, without any apparent reason.

'At last he discovered that you two saw each other from the roofs pretty frequently, and that you even went the length of absenting yourself from college to sit on the roof at midday with a book in your hand, so fond had you grown suddenly of solitary study. Bipradas came to me for advice, and told me everything. "Uncle," said I to him, "for a long while you have cherished a desire to go on a pilgrimate to Benares. You had better do it now, and leave the girl in my charge. I will take care of her."

'So he went. I lodged the girl in the house of Sripati Chatterji, passing him off as her father. What happened next is known to you. I feel a great relief to-day, having told you everything from the beginning. It sounds like a romance, doesn't it? I think of turning it into a book, and getting it printed. But I am not a writing-man myself. They say my nephew has some aptitude that way—I will get him to write it for me. But the best thing would be, if you would collaborate with him, because

the conclusion of the story is not known to me so well.'

Without paying much attention to the concluding remarks of Peari Sankar, Hemanta asked: 'Did not Kusum object to this marriage?'

'Well,' said Peari Sankar, 'it is very difficult to guess. You know, my boy, how women's minds are constituted. When they say 'no,' they mean 'yes.' During the first few days after her removal to the new home, she went almost crazy at not seeing you. You, too, seemed to have discovered her new address somehow, as you used to lose your way after starting for college, and loiter about in front of Sripati's house. Your eyes did not appear to be exactly in search of the Presidency College, as they were directed towards the barred windows of a private house, through which nothing but insects and the hearts of moon-struck young men could obtain access. I felt very sorry for you both. I could see that your studies were being seriously interrupted, and that the plight of the girl was pitiable also.

'One day I called Kusum to me, and said: "Listen to me, my daughter. I am an old man, and you need feel no delicacy in my presence. I know whom you desire at heart. The young man's condition is hopeless too. I wish I could bring about your union." At this Kusum suddenly melted into tears, and ran away. On several evenings after that, I visited Sripati's house, and, calling Kusum to me, discussed with her matters relating to you, and so I succeeded in gradually overcoming her shyness. At last, when I said that I would try to bring about a marriage, she asked me: "How can it be?" "Never mind," I said, "I would pass you off as

a Brahmin maiden." After a good deal of argument, she begged me to find out whether you would approve of it. "What nonsense!" replied I; "the boy is well-nigh mad as it were—what's the use of disclosing all these complications to him? Let the ceremony be over smoothly and then—all's well that ends well. Especially as there is not the slightest risk of its ever leaking out, why go out of the way to make a fellow miserable for life?"

'I do not know whether the plan had Kusum's assent or not. At times she wept, and at other times she remained silent. If I said, "Let us drop it then," she would become very restless. When things were in this state, I sent Sripati to you with the proposal of marriage; you consented without a moment's hesitation. Everything was settled.

'Shortly before the day fixed, Kusum became so obstinate that I had the greatest difficulty in bringing her round again. "Do let it drop, uncle," she said to me constantly. "What do you mean, you silly child?" I rebuked her; "how can we back out now, when everythikng has been settled?"

'"Spread a rumour that I am dead," she implored. "Send me away somewhere."

'"What would happen to the young man then?" said I. "He is now in the seventh heaven of delight, expecting that his long-cherished desire would be fulfilled to-morrow; and to-day you want me to send him the news of your death? The result would be that to-morrow I should have to bear news of his death to you, and the same evening your death would be reported to me. Do you imagine, child, that I am capable of committing a girl-murder and a Brahmin-murder at my age?"

'Eventually the happy marriage was celebrated at the auspicious moment, and I felt relieved of a burdensome duty which I owed to myself. What happened afterwards you know best.'

'Couldn't you stop after having done us an irreparable injury?' burst out Hemanta after a short silence. 'Why have you told the secret now?'

With the utmost composure, Peari Sankar replied: 'When I saw that all arrangements had been made for the wedding of your sister, I said to myself: "Well, I have fouled the caste of one Brahmin, but that was only from a sense of duty. Here, another Brahmin's caste is imperilled, and this time it is my plain duty to prevent it." So I wrote to them saying that I was in a position to prove that you had taken the daughter of a *sudra* to wife.'

Controlling himself with a gigantic effort, Hemanta said: 'What will become of this girl whom I shall abandon now? Would you give her food and shelter?'

'I have done what was mine to do,' replied Peari Sankar calmly. 'It is no part of my duty to look after the discarded wives of other people. Anybody there? Get a glass of coconut milk for Hemanta Babu with ice in it. And some *pan* too.'

Hemanta rose, and took his departure without waiting for this luxurious hospitality.

IV

It was the fifth night of the waning of the moon—and the night was dark. No birds were singing. The *lichi* tree by the tank looked like a smudge of ink on a background a shade less deep. The south wind was blindly roaming about in the darkness like a

sleep-walker. The stars in the sky with vigilant unblinking eyes were trying to penetrate the darkness, in their effort to fathom some profound mystery.

No light shone in the bedroom. Hemanta was sitting on the side of the bed next the open window, gazing at the darkness in front of him. Kusum lay on the floor, clasping her husband's feet with both her arms, and her face resting on them. Time stood like an ocean hushed into stillness. On the background of eternal night, Fate seemed to have painted this one single picture for all time—annihilation on every side, the judge in the centre of it, and the guilty one at his feet.

The sound of slippers was heard again. Approaching the door, Harihar Mukerji said: 'You have had enough time,—I can't allow you more. Turn the girl out of the house.'

Kusum, as she heard this, embraced her husband's feet with all the ardour of a lifetime, covered them with kisses, and touching her forehead to them reverentially, withdrew herself.

Hemanta rose, and walking to the door, said: 'Father, I won't forsake my wife.'

'What!' roared out Harihar, 'would you lose your caste, sir?'

'I don't care for caste,' was Hemanta's calm reply.

'Then you too I renounce.'

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

penetrated. Entered. From the Latin "penetrare," cognate with "penitus," meaning interior.

animation. Liveliness. The word came into English from Latin "animare," meaning to quicken, from "anima", breath, spirit.

telescope. Instrument with glass lenses which makes distant objects seem magnified and closer. The word came into English from the Italian "telescopio" and ultimately from the combination in Greek of the words "tele-," meaning far, and "skopos," meaning watcher, the two together making "teleskopos," meaning far-seeing. Cf. *telegraph, telephone, television.*

punishment. Penalty inflicted for some misdeed. The word came into English through the French "punir," from Latin "punire," and is related to the Greek "poiné," meaning a fine.

jest. Teasing remark, joke. The word originally meant exploit, from Old French "geste" from the Latin "gesta," related to the verb "gerere," to do. There has been a change of meaning in the English word.

scorched. Caused pain or injury by heat. The earlier form of this word in English was "scorken," perhaps from Old Norse "skorpna," to be shrivelled.

apathetic. Indifferent. The word came into English through the French "apathie" from the Latin and ultimately from the Greek "apatheia," from "apathes," meaning without feeling, made up of the combination "a-," not, and "pathos," suffering.

duration. Length of time. The word came into English through French from late Latin "duration," related to "durare," to last. Cf. *endure* and *obdurate* below.

ostracism. Exclusion, or exile from society. In Athens, the name of the person to be ostracised was written on a fragment of pottery, for which the Greek word was "ostrakon," from which came "ostrakizo," and through it the English word.

arrogating. Boastfully demanding, claiming without good reason. The word came from Latin "arrogare," from "rogare," to ask.

obdurate. Hard and unmoved. This word came from the Latin "obdurare," in which "durare" means harden, related to "durus," meaning hard.

renounce. Agree to abandon or give up. The word came into English from French "renoncer" and ultimately from the Latin "renuntiare" ("nuntiare," meaning announce).

aptitude. Talent, natural ability. The word came into English through French from Latin "aptitudo," related to "aptus," meaning fitted, past participle of "apere," to fasten.

collaborate. Work together with. The word came into English from the Latin "collaborare," ("con," together, "laborare," to work).

crazy. Distracted, mad. This word came into English from the Swedish "krasa" either directly or perhaps through Old French "acraser." The word "craze," to which it is related, originally meant to break or shatter.

auspicious. Fortunate. This word came from the Latin "auspicari" ("auspex," observer of birds, from "avis" meaning bird, and "specere,"

look at). The development in the meaning of the word is obvious, as the Romans laid great stress on the flight of birds as omens.

annihilation. Ruin and destruction. The word came into English through the French " annihiler " from the Latin " annihilare, " related to "nihil," meaning nothing. Compare *nihilistic*.

caste. A clearly-defined class with the same views, religion, or trade. It came into English from the Spanish and Portuguese "casta," meaning lineage.

THE SKELETON

In the room next to the one in which we boys used to sleep, there hung a human skeleton. In the night it would rattle in the breeze which played about its bones. In the day these bones were rattled by us. We were taking lessons in osteology from a student in the Campbell Medical School, for our guardians were determined to make us masters of all the sciences. How far they succeeded we need not tell those who know us; and it is better hidden from those who do not.

Many years have passed since then. In the meantime the skeleton has vanished from the room, and the science of osteology from our brains, leaving no trace behind.

The other day, our house was crowded with guests, and I had to pass the night in the same old room. In these now unfamiliar surroundings, sleep refused to come, and, as I tossed from side to side, I heard all the hours of the night chimed, one after another, by the church clock near by. At length the lamp in the corner of the room, after some minutes of choking and spluttering, went out altogether. One or two bereavements had recently happened in the family, so the going out of the lamp naturally led me to thoughts of death. In the great arena of nature, I thought, the light of a lamp losing itself in eternal darkness, and the going out of the light of our little human lives, by day or by night, were much the same thing.

My train of thought recalled to my mind the

skeleton. While I was trying to imagine what the body which had clothed it could have been like, it suddenly seemed to me that something was walking round and round my bed, groping along the walls of the room. I could hear its rapid breathing. It seemed as if it was searching for something which it could not find, and pacing round the room with ever-hastier steps. I felt quite sure that this was a mere fancy of my sleepless, excited brain; and that the throbbing of the veins in my temples was really the sound which seemed like running footsteps. Nevertheless, a cold shiver ran all over me. To help to get rid of this hallucination, I called out aloud: 'Who is there?' The footsteps seemed to stop at my bedside, and the reply came: 'It is I. I have come to look for that skeleton of mine.'

It seemed absurd to show any fear before the creature of my own imagination; so, clutching my pillow a little more tightly, I said in a casual sort of way: 'A nice business for this time of night! Of what use will that skeleton be to you now?'

The reply seemed to come almost from my mosquito-curtain itself. 'What a question! In that skeleton were the bones that encircled my heart; the youthful charm of my six-and-twenty years bloomed about it. Should I not desire to see it once more?'

'Of course,' said I, 'a perfectly reasonable desire. Well, go on with your search, while I try to get a little sleep.'

Said the voice: 'But I fancy you are lonely. All right; I'll sit down a while, and we will have a little chat. Years ago I used to sit by men and talk to them. But during the last thirty-five years

I have only moaned in the wind in the burning-places of the dead. I would talk once more with a man as in the old times.'

I felt that some one sat down just near my curtain. Resigning myself to the situation, I replied with as much cordiality as I could summon: 'That will be very nice indeed. Let us talk of something cheerful.'

'The funniest thing I can think of is my own life-story. Let me tell you that.'

The church clock chimed the hour of two.

'When I was in the land of the living, and young, I feared one thing like death itself, and that was my husband. My feelings can be likened only to those of a fish caught with a hook. For it was as if a stranger had snatched me away with the sharpest of hooks from the peaceful calm of my childhood's home—and from him I had no means of escape. My husband died two months after my marriage, and my friends and relations moaned pathetically on my behalf. My husband's father, after scrutinising my face with great care, said to my mother-in-law: "Do you not see, she has the evil eye?"—Well, are you listening? I hope you are enjoying the story?'

'Very much indeed!' said I. 'The beginning is extremely humorous.'

'Let me proceed then. I came back to my father's house in great glee. People tried to conceal it from me, but I knew well that I was endowed with a rare and radiant beauty. What is your opinion?'

'Very likely,' I murmured. 'But you must remember that I never saw you.'

'What! Not seen me? What about that

skeleton of mine? Ha! ha! ha! Never mind. I was only joking. How can I ever make you believe that those two cavernous hollows contained the brightest of dark, languishing eyes? And that the smile which was revealed by those ruby lips had no resemblance whatever to the grinning teeth which you used to see? The mere attempt to convey to you some idea of the grace, the charm, the soft, firm, dimpled curves, which in the fulness of youth were growing and blossoming over those dry old bones makes me smile; it also makes me angry. The most eminent doctors of my time could not have dreamed of the bones of that body of mine as materials for teaching osteology. Do you know, one young doctor that I knew of, actually compared me to a golden *champak* blossom. It meant that to him the rest of humankind was fit only to illustrate the science of physiology, that I was a flower of beauty. Does any one think of the skeleton of a *champak* flower?

'When I walked, I felt that, like a diamond scattering splendour, my every movement set waves of beauty radiating on every side. I used to spend hours gazing on my hands—hands which could gracefully have reined the liveliest of male creatures.

'But that stark and staring old skeleton of mine has borne false witness to you against me, while I was unable to refute the shameless libel. That is why of all men I hate you most! I feel I would like once for all to banish sleep from your eyes with a vision of that warm rosy loveliness of mine, to sweep out with it all the wretched osteological stuff of which your brain is full.'

'I could have sworn by your body,' cried I, 'if you had it still, that no vestige of osteology has remained in my head, and that the only thing that it is now full of is a radiant vision of perfect loveliness, glowing against the black background of night. I cannot say more than that.'

'I had no girl-companions,' went on the voice. 'My only brother had made up his mind not to marry. In the zenana I was alone. Alone I used to sit in the garden under the shade of the trees, and dream that the whole world was in love with me; that the stars with sleepless gaze were drinking in my beauty; that the wind was languishing in sighs as on some pretext or other it brushed past me; and that the lawn on which my feet rested, had it been conscious, would have lost consciousness again at their touch. It seemed to me that all the young men in the world were as blades of grass at my feet; and my heart, I know not why, used to grow sad.

'When my brother's friend, Shekhar, had passed out of the Medical College, he became our family doctor. I had already often seen him from behind a curtain. My brother was a strange man, and did not care to look on the world with open eyes. It was not empty enough for his taste; so he gradually moved away from it, until he was quite lost in an obscure corner. Shekhar was his one friend, so he was the only young man I could ever get to see. And when I held my evening court in my garden, then the host of imaginary young men whom I had at my feet were each one a Shekhar. —Are you listening? What are you thinking of?'

I sighed as I replied: 'I was wishing I was Shekhar!'

'Wait a bit. Hear the whole story first. One day, in the rains, I was feverish. The doctor came to see me. That was our first meeting. I was reclining opposite the window, so that the blush of the evening sky might temper the pallor of my complexion. When the doctor, coming in, looked up into my face, I put myself into his place, and gazed at myself in imagination. I saw in the glorious evening light that delicate wan face laid like a drooping flower against the soft white pillow, with the unrestrained curls playing over the forehead, and the bashfully lowered eyelids casting a pathetic shade over the whole countenance.

'The doctor, in a tone bashfully low, asked my brother: "Might I feel her pulse?"

'I put out a tired, well-rounded wrist from beneath the coverlet. "Ah!" thought I, as I looked on it, "if only there had been a sapphire bracelet." I have never before seen a doctor so awkward about feeling a patient's pulse. His fingers trembled as they felt my wrist. He measured the heat of my fever, I gauged the pulse of his heart. —Don't you believe me?'

'Very easily,' said I; 'the human heart-beat tells its tale.'

'After I had been taken ill and restored to health several times, I found that the number of the courtiers who attended my imaginary evening reception began to dwindle till they were reduced to only one! And at last in my little world there remained only one doctor and one patient.

'In these evenings I used to dress myself secretly

in a canary-coloured *sari;* twine about the braided knot into which I did my hair a garland of white jasmine blossoms; and with a little mirror in my hand betake myself to my usual seat under the trees.

'Well! Are you perhaps thinking that the sight of one's own beauty would soon grow wearisome? Ah no! for I did not see myself with my own eyes. I was then one and also two. I used to see myself as though I were the doctor; I gazed, I was charmed, I fell madly in love. But, in spite of all the caresses I lavished on myself, a sigh would wander about my heart, moaning like the evening breeze.

'Anyhow, from that time I was never alone. When I walked I watched with downcast eyes the play of my dainty little toes on the earth, and wondered what the doctor would have felt had he been there to see. At mid-day the sky would be filled with the glare of the sun, without a sound, save now and then the distant cry of a passing kite. Outside our garden-walls the hawker would pass with his musical cry of "Bangles for sale, crystal bangles." And I, spreading a snow-white sheet on the lawn, would lie on it with my head on my arm. With studied carelessness the other arm would rest lightly on the soft sheet, and I would imagine to myself that some one had caught sight of the wonderful pose of my hand, that some one had clasped it in both of his and imprinted a kiss on its rosy palm, and was slowly walking away.—What if I ended the story here? How would it do?'

'Not half a bad ending,' I replied thoughtfully. 'It would no doubt remain a little incomplete, but

I could easily spend the rest of the night putting in the finishing touches.'

'But that would make the story too serious. Where would the laugh come in? Where would be the skeleton with its grinning teeth?

'So let me go on. As soon as the doctor had got a little practice, he took a room on the ground-floor of our house for a consulting-chamber. I used then sometimes to ask him jokingly about medicines and poisons, and how much of this drug or that would kill a man. The subject was congenial and he would wax eloquent. These talks familiarised me with the idea of death; and so love and death were the only two things that filled my little world. My story is now nearly ended—there is not much left.'

'Not much of the night is left either,' I muttered.

'After a time I noticed that the doctor had grown strangely absent-minded, and it seemed as if he were ashamed of something which he was trying to keep from me. One day he came in, somewhat smartly dressed, and borrowed my brother's carriage for the evening.

'My curiosity became too much for me, and I went up to my brother for information. After some talk beside the point, I at last asked him: "By the way, Dada, where is the doctor going this evening in your carriage?"

'My brother briefly replied: "To his death."

'"Oh, do tell me," I importuned. "Where is he really going?"

'"To be married," he said, a little more explicitly.

'"Oh, indeed!" said I, as I laughed long and loudly.

'I gradually learnt that the bride was an heiress, who would bring the doctor a large sum of money. But why did he insult me by hiding all this from me? Had I ever begged and prayed him not to marry, because it would break my heart? Men are not to be trusted. I have known only one man in all my life, and in a moment I made this discovery.

'When the doctor came in after his work and was ready to start, I said to him, rippling with laughter the while: "Well, doctor, so you are to be married to-night?"

'My gaiety not only made the doctor lose countenance; it thoroughly irritated him.

'"How is it," I went on, "that there is no illumination, no band of music?"

'With a sigh he replied: "Is marriage then such a joyful occasion?"

'I burst out into renewed laughter. "No, no," said I, "this will never do. Whoever heard of a wedding without lights and music?"

'I bothered my brother about it so much that he at once ordered all the trappings of a gay wedding.

'All the time I kept on gaily talking of the bride, of what would happen, of what I would do when the bride came home. "And, doctor," I asked, "will you you still go on feeling pulses?" Ha! ha! ha! Though the inner workings of people's, especially men's minds are not visible, still I can take my oath that these words were piercing the doctor's bosom like deadly darts.

'The marriage was to be celebrated late at night. Before starting, the doctor and my brother were

having a glass of wine together on the terrace, as was their daily habit. The moon had just risen.

'I went up smiling, and said: "Have you forgotten your wedding, doctor? It is time to start."

'I must here tell you one little thing. I had meanwhile gone down to the dispensary and got a little powder, which at a convenient opportunity I had dropped unobserved into the doctor's glass.

'The doctor, draining his glass at a gulp, in a voice thick with emotion, and with a look that pierced me to the heart, said: "Then I must go."

'The music struck up. I went into my roon and dressed myself in my bridal-robes of silk and gold. I took out my jewellery and ornaments from the safe and put them all on; I put the red mark of wifehood on the parting in my hair. And then under the tree in the garden I prepared my bed.

'It was a beautiful night. The gentle south wind was kissing away the weariness of the world. The scent of jasmine and *bela* filled the garden with rejoicing.

'When the sound of the music began to grow fainter and fainter; the light of the moon to get dimmer and dimmer; the world with its lifelong associations of home and kin to fade away from my preceptions like some illusion;—then I closed my eyes, and smiled.

'I fancied that when people came and found me they would see that smile of mine lingering on my lips like a trace of rose-coloured wine, that when I thus slowly entered my eternal bridal-chamber I should carry with me this smile, illuminating my face. But alas for the bridal-chamber! Alas for the bridal-robes of silk and gold! When I woke at the sound of a

rattling within me, I found three urchins learning osteology from my skeleton. Where in my bosom my joys and griefs used to throb, and the petals of youth to open one by one, there the master with his pointer was busy naming my bones. And as to that last smile, which I had so carefully rehearsed, did you see any sign of that?

'Well, well, how did you like the story?'

'It has been delightful,' said I.

At this point the first crow began to caw. 'Are you there?' I asked. There was no reply.

The morning light entered the room.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

osteology. The science of anatomy concerning bones. The word came into English from the Greek "osteǫn," meaning bone, and "logos," word.

clock. This word came into English from Middle Dutch "clocke" or Old Northern French "cloke," ultimate from late Latin "cloca." Originally it meant bell, probably from the sound.

hallucination. Illusion, vision having no real existence. The word came into English from late Latin "(h)allucinatio," related to "(h)allucinari," meaning to wander in mind.

cordiality. Friendliness. The word came into English from mediæval Latin "cordialis," related to "cor," meaning heart.

zenana. The women's quarters in an Eastern house. The word came into English from Hindustani and is related to the Persian "zanana" ("zan" meaning woman).

obscure. Dark, not clear. The word came into English from the French " obscur, " from the Latin " obscurus, " related to Sanskrit " sku, " to cover.

lavished. Poured out freely. The modern use of the word is from the obsolete " lavish, " meaning profusion, from Old French " lavache, " meaning a downpour of rain.

trappings. Ornaments, decorations. The word came into English from French " draper, " meaning to clothe.

urchin. Naughty or mischievous boy. The word came into English from Old Northern French " herichon, " from the Latin " ericius, " meaning hedgehog.

THE RIVER STAIRS

If you wish to hear of days gone by, sit on this step of mine, and lend your ears to the murmur of the rippling water.

The month of *Ashwin* (September) wsa about to begin. The river was in full flood. Only four of my steps peeped above the surface. The water had crept up to the low-lying parts of the bank, where the *kachu* plant grew dense beneath the branches of the mango grove. At that bend of the river, three old brick-heaps towered above the water around them. The fishing-boats, moored to the trunks of the *bābla* trees on the bank, rocked on the heaving flow-tide at dawn. The path of tall grasses on the sandbank had caught the newly risen sun; they had begun to flower, and were not yet in full bloom.

The little boats puffed out their tiny sails on the sunlit river. The Brahmin priest had come to bathe with his ritual vessels. The women arrived in twos and threes to draw water. I knew this was the time of Kusum's coming to the bathing-stairs.

But that morning I missed her. Bhuban and Swarno mourned at the *ghāt*. They said that their friend had been led away to her husband's house, which was a place far away from the river, with strange people, strange houses, and strange roads.

In time she almost faded out of my mind. A year passed. The women at the *ghāt* now rarely talked of Kusum. But one evening I was startled

by the touch of the long familiar feet. Ah, yes, but those feet were now without anklets, they had lost their old music.

Kusum had become a widow. They said that her husband had worked in some far-off place, and that she had met him only once or twice. A letter brought her the news of his death. A widow at eight years old, she had rubbed out the wife's red mark from her forehead, stripped off her bangles, and come back to her old home by the Ganges. But she found few of her old playmates there. Of them, Bhuban, Swarno, and Amala were married, and gone away; only Sarat remained, and she too, they said, would be wed in December next.

As the Ganges rapidly grows to fulness with the coming of the rains, even so did Kusum day by day grow to the fulness of beauty and youth. But her dull-coloured robe, her pensive face, and quiet manners drew a veil over her youth, and hid it from men's eyes as in a mist. Ten years slipped away, and none seemed to have noticed that Kusum had grown up.

One morning such as this, at the end of a far-off September, a tall, young, fair-skinned Sanyasi, coming I know not whence, took shelter in the Siva temple in front of me. His arrival was noised abroad in the village. The women left their pitchers behind, and crowded into the temple to bow to the holy man.

The crowd increased day by day. The Sanyasi's fame rapidly spread among the womenkind. One day he would recite the *Bhāgbat*, another day he would expound the *Gita*, or hold forth upon a holy book in the temple. Some sought him for counsel, some for spells, some for medicines.

So months passed away. In April, at the time of the solar eclipse, vast crowds came here to bathe in the Ganges. A fair was held under the *bābla* tree. Many of the pilgrims went to visit the Sanyasi, and among them were a party of women from the village where Kusum had been married.

It was morning. The Sanyasi was counting his beads on my steps, when all of a sudden one of the women pilgrims nudged another, and said: 'Why! He is our Kusum's husband!' Another parted her veil a little in the middle with two fingers and cried out: 'Oh dear me! So it is! He is the younger son of the Chattergu family of our village!' Said a third, who made little parade of her veil: 'Ah! he has got exactly the same brow, nose, and eyes!' Yet another woman, without turning to the Sanyasi, stirred the water with her pitcher, and sighed: 'Alas! That young man is no more; he will not come back. Bad luck to Kusum!'

But, objected one, 'He had not such a big beard'; and another, 'He was not so thin'; or 'He was most probably not so tall.' That settled the question for the time, and the matter spread no further.

One evening, as the full moon arose, Kusum came and sat upon my last step above the water, and cast her shadow upon me.

There was no other at the *ghat* just then. The crickets were chirping about me. The din of brass gongs and bells had ceased in the temple—the last wave of sound grew fainter and fainter, until it merged like the shade of a sound in the dim groves of the farther bank. On the dark water of the Ganges lay a line of glistening moonlight. On the

bank above, in bush and hedge, under the porch of the temple, in the base of ruined houses, by the side of the tank, in the palm grove, gathered shadows of fantastic shape. The bats swung from the *chhatim* boughs. Near the houses the loud clamour of the jackals rose and sank into silence.

Slowly the Sanyasi came out of the temple. Descending a few steps of the *ghāt* he saw a woman sitting alone, and was about to go back, when suddenly Kusum raised her head, and looked behind her. The veil slipped away from her. The moonlight fell upon her face, as she looked up.

The owl flew away hooting over their heads. Starting at the sound, Kusum came to herself and put the veil back on her head. Then she bowed low at the Sanyasi's feet.

He gave her blessing and asked: 'Who are you?'

She replied: 'I am called Kusum.'

No other word was spoken that night. Kusum went slowly back to her house which was hard by. But the Sanyasi remained sitting on my steps for long hours that night. At last when the moon passed from the east to the west, and the Sanyasi's shadow, shifting from behind, fell in front of him, he rose up and entered the temple.

Henceforth I saw Kusum come daily to bow at his feet. When he expounded the holy books, she stood in a corner listening to him. After finishing his morning service, he used to call her to himself and speak on religion. She could not have understood it all; but, listening attentively in silence, she tried to understand it. As he directed her so she acted implicitly. She daily served at the temple—ever alert in the god's worship—gather-

ing flowers for the *puja*, and drawing water from the Ganges to wash the temple floor.

The winter was drawing to its close. We had cold winds. But now and then in the evening the warm spring breeze would blow unexpectedly from the south; the sky would lose its chilly aspect; pipes would sound, and music be heard in the village after a long silence. The boatmen would set their boats drifting down the current, stop rowing, and begin to sing the songs of Krishna. This was the season.

Just then I began to miss Kusum. For some time she had given up visiting the temple, the *ghāt*, or the Sanyasi.

What happened next I do not know, but after a while the two met together on my steps one evening.

With downcast looks, Kusum asked: 'Master, did you send for me?'

'Yes, why do I not see you? Why have you grown neglectful of late in serving the gods?'

She kept silent.

'Tell me your thoughts without reserve.'

Half averting her face, she replied: 'I am a sinner, Master, and hence I have failed in the worship.'

The Sanyasi said: 'Kusum, I know there is unrest in your heart.'

She gave a slight start, and, drawing the end of her *sari* over her face, she sat down on the step at the Sanyasi's feet, and wept.

He moved a little away, and said: 'Tell me what you have in your heart, and I shall show you the way to peace.'

She replied in a tone of unshaken faith, stopping now and then for words: 'If you bid me, I must speak out. But, then, I cannot explain it clearly. You, Master, must have guessed it all. I adored one as a god, I worshipped him, and the bliss of that devotion filled my heart to fulness. But one night I dreamt that the lord of my heart was sitting in a garden somewhere, clasping my right hand in his left, and whispering to me of love. The whole scene did not appear to me at all strange. The dream vanished, but its hold on me remained. Next day when I beheld him he appeared in another light than before. That dream-picture continued to haunt my mind. I fled far from him in fear, and the picture clung to me. Thenceforth my heart has known no peace,—all has grown dark within me!'

While she was wiping her tears and telling this tale, I felt that the Sanyasi was firmly pressing my stone surface with his right foot.

Her speech done, the Sanyasi said:

'You must tell me whom you saw in your dream.'

With folded hands, she entreated: 'I cannot.'

He insisted: 'You must tell me who he was.'

Wringing her hands she asked: 'Must I tell it?

He replied: 'Yes, you must.'

Then crying, 'You are he, Master!' she fell on her face on my stony bosom, and sobbed.

When she came to herself, and sat up, the Sanyasi said slowly: 'I am leaving this place to-night that you may not see me again. Know that I am a Sanyasi, not belonging to this world. *You* must forget me.'

Kusum replied in a low voice: 'It will be so, Master.'

The Sanyasi said: 'I take my leave.'

Without a word more Kusum bowed to him, and placed the dust of his feet on her head. He left the place.

The moon set; the night grew dark. I heard a splash in the water. The wind raved in the darkness, as if it wanted to blow out all the stars of the sky.

WORDS TO BE STUDIED

familiar. Accustomed, well-known. The word came into English through French "familier" from Latin "familiaris," of the "familia," or household.

veil. A trailing half-transparent material which covers the face. The word came into English through Anglo-French "veile" (Old and Modern French "voile") from the Latin "velum," a curtain, awning, or veil.

noticed. Realised, observed. The word came into English through French from Latin "notitia" ("notus," past participle of "noscere," to know).

medicine. This word came into English from Old French "medecine" and ultimately from the Latin "medicina" (medicus," meaning a doctor).

solar. Of the sun. Latin "solaris" ("sol"—sun).

eclipse. Interception of the light of one planet by another. The word came into English through Old French from Latin and ultimately from the Greek "ekleipsis," from "ekleipo," meaning to fail to appear.

parade. Show. The word came into English from the French "parade," meaning show, from Italian "parata" and ultimately from Latin "parare," meaning to make ready, provide, design.

temple. Building used for the worship of a god. From the Latin "templum," cognate with the Greek "temenos," from a verb meaning to cut.

current. This word came into English from Old French "corant," participle of "courir," from the Latin "currere," meaning to run.

alert. Quick, ready. This word came into English from French "alerte," earlier "allerte," from the Italian "all'erta" ("alla" meaning "on the" and "erta," watch-tower, from the Latin "erigere" meaning to erect).

NOTES

THE TRUST PROPERTY

The incident described in this story, now happily a thing of the past, was by no means rare in Bengal at one time. In the superstitious belief that in a future state of existence they would once again possess the wealth they had accumulated in this world, misers resorted to the kind of criminal practice related here. The victim usually chosen to become a *yak* was young, and would be made to promise that he would make over to the present owner all the wealth he was to guard, when he met the latter passing that way in a future existence. Till then he was to guard the treasure and not stir from his post of duty. In his childhood, Tagore must have heard many "true" stories of people suddenly becoming rich by coming across ghostly custodians of wealth that had belonged to them in a previous life.

rishis: Religious men who give up the world and live only to serve God.

unreasonable demands: The word "unreasonable" is used sarcastically in the sense that Brindaban's father felt that even the cost of food was too much.

kabiraj: A country doctor not qualified or trained in medicine.

hooka: A pipe for smoking with a long flexible tube and a vase at the bottom which contains water. The smoke drawn through the water is cooled before it touches the lips of the smoker. The *hooka* is a characteristic feature of life in North India and the centre of the gatherings of the men in their leisure hours. Since the *hooka* was sometimes provided with several branching tubes leading out of the same central piece, a number of smokers could sit round it, all using it at the same time.

as shedding the holy blood of cows: To kill a cow was a great crime in Hindu society, as the animal was considered a sacred symbol of Krishna.

was without a drawback: Had no disadvantage attached to it.

puja: The periodical rites that devout Hindus perform to their household gods during the day.

dhoti: The long white sheet that men in India wear as their lower garment. It is usually made of thin muslin and falls from the waist to the ankles.

No one ventured to say his real name: There is a superstition in Bengal that if a person mentions the name of a miser, he has to go without his meals that day.

Jaganash: The syllable "-nash" means destruction. Hence when the name Jaganath, which means the Lord of the World was changed to Jaganash, it would mean the Destruction of the World, an inauspicious name. (Sanskrit "jagat" means world and "natha" lord.)

chadar. The literal meaning of the word is sheet. It is also the white sheet used as a covering for the upper part of the body in some parts of Northern India.

gamcha: A long, narrow strip of cloth slung across the shoulder and used as a scarf or towel. It is both decorative and useful.

he had paid his reckoning in full beforehand: He behaved like a guest at an inn who had paid his bill for food and lodging in advance and therefore felt he had a right to command anything he wanted.

Their hearts......justice: They pretended to sympathise with the boy's parents, but the warmth with which they denounced him proved that they envied him because he was to become Jaganath's heir.

ghurra: A mud or brass water-pot holding about three gallons of water.

assan: A prayer carpet.

vermilion: A deep red powder used to mark the forehead in religious ceremonies.

mohur: A gold coin of British India worth fifteen rupees. It is no longer in circulation but was treasured as a means of hoarding wealth.

mantras: Special prayers or incantations, usually in Sanskrit.

yak: or *yaksa,* is a supernatural being described in Sanskrit mythology and poetry. In Bengal *yak* has come to stand for a ghostly custodian of treasure, a victim of circumstances of the kind related in this story.

THE KINGDOM OF CARDS

in a listless groove: Continually doing the same thing without feeling any interest in it.

fallen from favour: Lost the good opinion of the King.

the Flying Horse:
the jewel in the Cobra's hood:
the Rose of Heaven:
the Magic Roads:
Princess Beauty sleeping in the Ogre's castle:
} Subjects of all the traditional Eastern stories of adventure.

kotwal: Chief constable of an Indian town, or a magistrate.

nice adjustment: Delicate arrangement.

some obsolete dealing with the question: An out-of-date precedent or ruling which would help in deciding the matter.

chilled through to the bone: The silence penetrated into them like extreme cold.

let us away: Poetic way of saying "let us go away."

without a ripple: Without the slightest disturbance.

Ichcha: Desire, or wish.

to her rescue: To help her out of the confusion.

elbowed out: Pushed out by being nudged out of their places.

confusion had never been so confounded before: There had never been such utter confusion before. "Confusion worse confounded" occurs in Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

kokil: The bird of Spring which is often mentioned in Indian love poetry.

passably good-looking: Moderately handsome.

strutting about like a peacock: Walking about as pompously as a peacock.

dressing themselves up to the Nines: This is a clever play upon words, The phrase "dressed up to the nines" means "very smartly dressed." "dressed to perfection."

castles in the air, or fortresses of sand: Visionary plans, day-dreams which will not come true.

she could hardly raise......chosen: In Indian epic poetry, the Princess chose her husband from among a gathering of her suitors by putting a garland of jasmine round his neck.

THE HUNGRY STONES

Puja trip: The holiday for *Durga Puja*, a festival widely celebrated.

the Russians had advanced close to us: This was always a topical question in Northern India during the British régime, because British policy involved the guarding of the North-West Frontier against Russian invasion.

There happen......newspapers: An adaptation of two lines from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Vedas: The ancient Hindu scriptures written in Sanskrit.

theosophist: A believer in the system of philosophy which recognises all religions and believes in the attainment of God by spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or a special individual relationship.

ghazals: Persian love lyrics which came into fashion in India after the Moghul conquest.

I passed it off with a light laugh: Did not take it seriously, and made no reply but a careless laugh.

would fain: Would be glad to. Poetic phrase not used in prose unless for special effect.

the Muse....possessed me: The goddess of inspiration, who according to the Greek idea, entered the mind of the poet or artist and inspired his work.

moghlai: Persian fare, highly spiced and rich.

ghi: Cooking fat made of buffalo milk.

sola hat: Special pith hat made for protection against the sun, often worn by Englishmen in India.

attar: A fragrant oily scent made from rose-petals.

lingered in my nostrils: (I) could smell it faintly but persistently.

nahabat: A musical band playing at stated times before the palace of a king or prince.

horse-laugh: A loud, coarse laugh.

Arabian Nights: A famous collection of Eastern stories.

had been wafted to me from the world of romance: Had been sent to me as a reality from these imaginary stories.

fraught with peril: Full of danger.

negro eunuch: In Eastern tales, the Princess is guarded by a huge negro whose tongue has been cut off, so that he can give away no secrets.

narghileh: A Persian tobacco-pipe very similar to the *hooka*.

henna: A plant whose juice is used as a dye for the hair and the body.

Bedouin: An Arab of the desert.

Badshah: Also spelt Padishah, Padshah. The Persian title of the Shah of Persia.

sareng: A sort of violin. This word is related to the Hindustani "sarangi," also a stringed musical instrument.
chamar: The tail of the yak, a symbol of sovereignty.
chaprasi: Bearer, servant.
salam: The Indian form of salutation with folded hands.
Nizamat: The royalty or sovereign power of the Nizam.
imposed upon us: Deceived us with this tale.

RAJA AND RANI

born with a golden spoon in his mouth: The usual idiom is "to be born with a silver spoon in his mouth." It means born of a prosperous family or destined to be wealthy.
like the wheel of Jaganath's car: The great idol of Krishna at Puri is dragged every year on a huge and heavy car by large numbers of devotees who sometimes throw themselves under its wheels as a sacrifice. In the sense in which it is used here, it means that Bipin Kishore lived with the splendour associated with this annual festival.
the Court of Wards: During the British régime in India, the minor sons of Rajas and chieftains were under the control of the Court of Wards, which looked after their states or property till they attained their majoirty.
"admitted him of his crew": A line adapted from Milton's "L'Allegro;" it means allowed him to join his company.
became enamoured of: Was fascinated by.
she never cares a brass button: She does not care in the least.
hanger-on: A close associate, usually someone of lower status who is dependant on a person of higher rank or greater wealth than himself.
to cover the food for him: To keep it protected from the dust.
to whine: To complain.
He took everything in good part: He was not offended at the servants for their neglect of him.
knew no bounds: Reached the extreme point, could not be controlled.
fell to dilating: Began to describe in detail. "**Fall to**" is an idiom like "set to," meaning to begin.
the tables were turned: The relations (between them) were now reversed. This is from an idiom describing a change of situation brought about when the winner becomes the loser or *vice-versa*, in the game of backgammon.
the Kachari: Also spelt "cutcherry," meaning offices and courts.
turned the subject: He changed the topic of conversation.
first-rice ceremony: In Eastern countries a ceremony is performed when a child is old enough to eat its first solid meal, which in India is usually of rice.
the live-long day: The whole length of the day, usually used with the implication of weariness or pleasure.
took his cue: Took a hint how to behave in future (from the remarks of his master). The cue means literally the last words of a speech in a play, serving as a signal to another actor to enter or to speak. The idiomatic use of the word developed naturally out of the literal sense.

of an evening: On some evenings.
zemindari: Pertaining to his "zamin" or property. The word comes from the Persian "zamindar," in which "zamin" means earth, and "dar" means holder.
a little taken aback: Slightly surprised, disconcerted.
made no end of efforts: Tried extremely hard.
bakshish: A tip or present, usually from a superior to an inferior.

THE FUGITIVE GOLD

Government stock: Money lent to Government on which the lender receives interest.
were candidates for: Were ready to take them.
even an orphan......walls: This is a hyperbole, a figure of speech in which the situation is described in an exaggerated manner.
break upon: Interrupt, disturb.
rice water: In India rice is cooked by steeping it in water, letting it boil and then draining the water off. This water is used as a nourishing drink in poor households.
the baser metals: Metals which are less valuable than gold.
alarming amount: A humorous way of describing the large quantity he ate and drank.
to build golden castles in the air: The usual idiom in English is "to build castles in the air," or "castles in Spain," meaning to imagine wonderful things happening which cannot come true.
to every palmist.......horoscope: Palmistry and the reading of the future from one's horoscope are widely practised in India.
throw (his science) to the winds: Give up utterly, abandon.
spurred him on: Urged him, pressed him forward.
Puja Festival: *Durga Puja*, a festival widely celebrated in India.
to boot: As well, in addition.
Mammon: The evil God of wealth, referred to in the Christian Gospels. (Matthew VI. 24 and Luke XVI. 9-13.)
Durga: A beneficent goddess much revered in Bengal.
subterranean inferno of everlasting failures: A fiery world underground, in which those who, like him, had failed in their endeavours lamented for ever.
to endure the burden of his sordid days: To bear the misery of living his wretched life. "Days" means life in idioms like "end one's days."
feeling the shadow of a calamity: Sensing that something disastrous was going to happen.
prepared her master's tobacco: Probably in the cup of the *hooka*.

THE EDITOR

a superfluity of attention: A great deal more attention than was required.
If you make holes......music: He compares himself to a bamboo tube, which can either be useful as a receptacle for holding oil or water, or be decorative by producing music.

tasted of fame: Enjoyed being famous for the first time.
go to Jericho: An idiom meaning "go to the devil" or "I do not care what happens to you."
a screaming farce: An extremely funny play, causing spectators to scream with laughter.
in the measure: In the same proportion, to the same degree.
potential bridegrooms: Possible bridegrooms.
to feel a halo about my forehead: He felt he was as great as one of the saints around whose heads circles of light are always depicted.
bound them both over to keep the peace: They were obliged by law not to fight with one another.
I took the place.....rivals: Instead of arranging to fight his rival physically, the landlord of Jahirgram carried on the battle with the words supplied by the Editor of his paper.
What it.....urbanity: Its contents were expressed in crude and almost physical terms, with no polish or refinement.
to carry off the memory of a word with me: To talk to me in order to be able to quote what I said to them.
spiciest bits: The most piquant or pungent bits.
in the same strain: In the same tone, *i.e.*, in crude, unpolished terms.

THE VICTORY

unseen hearers.....hall: In some of the ancient kingdoms of India, it was the custom for the ladies of the royal family to sit behind screens in a balcony high up in the durbar hall, so that they could listen, unseen, to all that was happening when the King held his court.
the planet who ruled his destiny: A poetic way of describing the princess to whom the poet was devoted.
out of ken: Out of knowledge, beyond one's knowledge. This phrase is an old-fashioned colloquialism.
on the sly: Stealthily, secretly.
the battle of the muse: The struggle to prove who was the greater poet.
the arena: The central part of the amphitheatre in which combats took place in Roman times. *Arena* literally means sand. The author deliberately describes the contest between the two poets in terms of a combat.
like breakers of the sea: As powerful and as sonorous as great waves.
The skill.....combinations: This was a favourite test of skill in versifying in the olden days in India, and is still popular in "mushairas" where poets compete with each other.
stricken deer at bay: A wounded deer showing fight after a long hunt.
vina: An Indian seven-stringed musical instrument with a fretted fingerboard and a gourd at each end.
lost in the haze of the past: The ancient legends are very obscure, just like objects seen through a mist.
play of words: Skill in improvising.
of no account: Utterly unimportant.
the stops of the instrument: The knobs which press the strings or close the holes of musical instruments, changing the pitch of the sound.

his thoughts.....breeze: His thoughts were so alive that he imagined he could hear them making a sound like that of the rustling of leaves.
Krishna: An incarnation of Vishnu and a great deity of later Hinduism.
Radha: The consort of Krishna.
its fellow: Its companion.
wordmonger: One who makes oversubtle verbal distinctions.
took off his pearl chain.....head: As a token of victory in the competition. Later on, the princess in the same way gives the young poet a garland of flowers as the crown of victory.

THE LOST JEWELS

bathing ghāt: The flight of steps leading to the landing-place by the river, also to the bathing-place.
banyan tree: This tree is remarkable for the spread of its branches, as well as for the extent to which they root themselves.
after Ranchi: Which is an extremely hot place.
pursue the subject: Continue to talk about it.
entered sahibs' offices with his shoes on: When shoes and boots were still unknown in India, no one entered a house wearing sandals. They were always left in the outer courtyard.
he grew a beard: In Hindu society, beards were not allowed.
out of employment: Has nothing to keep her occupied.
Dacca muslin saris: These *saris* were exquisitely delicate and highly prized.
to oil its wheels: By being kind and loving to him.
To feed.....vow: It was common to make a vow to God that if He gave a person his wish, the beneficiary would feed a number of Brahmins. As the Brahmins were the religious leaders of the community and were poor, such an act was considered a highly pious one.
that is an ice-box: That is an extremely cold heart with no affection for any one.
playing the pickpocket with her own money: Being responsible for losing it herself.
to sail fair again: Carry on his business safely again.
to cast about: To devise means for, to go this way and that in search of (something).
hard pressed: In great difficulties.
set her face hard: Looked obstinate and hostile.
her blood froze: A chill of horror and fear ran through her.
would fall to his lot: Might be destined to become his, might come into his hands.
his desperate straits: The almost hopeless state of his affairs.
the festival of Krishna's birth: Known as Krishna Jayanti.
betel leaves: The leaves of the plant "Piper betel" which are chewed in India together with areca-nut parings, both for their taste and also to help digestion.
almirah: Wardrobe, or movable cupboard. It is a word that came into Hindustani through the Portuguese "almaria" from the Latin "armarium."
gait: Way of walking; manner or bearing as one walks.

MY FAIR NEIGHBOUR

like a hen....effusions: He expressed his own affection by fostering the feelings of another person, like the hen that hatches out a duck's egg.

waxes: Grows, increases.

perchance: By chance, perhaps. This is an archaic expression, now used mostly in poetry.

some living volcano: Feeling as great and intense as the heat and power of a volcano.

winging its way: Travelling on wings, speeding.

widow-remarriage: A widow in Hindu society was prohibited from marrying again by a very strong convention which claimed for itself almost a religious sanction. Hence widow-remarriage was one of the planks of social reform in India from the early years of the twentieth century.

the eleventh moon: The eleventh day after the new moon is seen is a day of fasting and penance.

from your safe distance: Because it will never happen to you and therefore you are safe.

a concession to: Giving in to.

It was flinging garlands before a deity: The deity was the widow, the garlands were the poems and the worshipper was Nabin.

I can appease my father: It would be necessary to do so because his father would not approve of his marrying a widow.

THE RENUNCIATION

In this story, Tagore shows the strong social prejudices that exist in India, especially among the people of the villages. The strongest perhaps is the prohibition against marrying a person of another caste. What might for this reason have become a domestic tragedy, is averted by the strength of the young man's feelings—but at the cost of his being renounced by his family. " My Fair Neighbour " deals with a similar theme.

papiya: One of the sweetest song-birds of Bengal. Because of its monotonous and repetitive notes, however, English writers about India have nicknamed it the " brain-fever " bird.

the lichi tree: Is found mostly in China, but also grows in parts of North India. The fruit is small and round, like a white grape, and is enclosed in a hard outer skin.

churi: The anklets.

mantra: A set of magic words.

angry pair of slippers: In this figure of speech, the " transferred epithet, " the emotion of the wearer is transferred to his slippers. Compare " The ploughman homeward plods his weary way. "

She waded barefoot through fire: While she related her story, she suffered as much as she would have done if she had actually walked barefoot through fire.

the priesthood: The rules laid down by the priests.

defiled our caste: By allowing Hemanta to marry a woman of another caste.

you will have to pay for it: You will be punished for it.

I will make.....ceremony: In those days, it was considered a social crime to leave India and cross " the seven seas " or to go abroad. A person who had done so and returned to India was not accepted by the rest of his community. If he wished to be allowed to enter it again, he had to go through a purification ceremony, known as " prayaschittam," in which he had to taste cow-dung as it was supposed to purify him.

your father stirred up the girl's people: He did so by telling the family of the prospective bride that the young man's family had been disowned by the community to which they all belonged.

to throw dust in eyes of her old guardian: To mislead him by misrepresentation or to divert his attention.

Parvati: The wife of the god Shiva, the Destroyer.

moon-struck: Deranged in mind. The term is used to describe a young man so deeply in love that he can think of nothing else. For the supposed influence of the moon on the mind, cf. *lunatic*.

seventh heaven: A state of the greatest happiness or satisfaction.

sudra: The lowest caste in Hindu society.

pan: The leaf of the betel, chewed together with lime and areca-nut parings.

touching her forehead to them: To touch another person's feet with one's forehead is a gesture of the greatest devotion and respect.

THE SKELETON

the youthful charm of my six-and-twenty years: The person whose skeleton it was had died at the age of twenty-six when she was young and charming.

she has the evil eye: A common superstition in many parts of the world credits certain people with the power of being able to bring harm or misfortune to others by a mere look, often without any such intention. In this case the girl's evil eye was supposed to have caused her young husband's early death.

champak: A sweet-smelling white flower.

reined: Used in a metaphorical sense to mean controlled, as a rider controls his horse with the help of his reins.

has borne false witness to you against me: Has given you a false impression of me, because it is ugly and does not show you how beautiful I was once.

with open eyes: Clearly, to see what other human beings were doing.

temper: Tone down, moderate.

if only there had been a sapphire bracelet: As she was a widow, she was not allowed to wear jewels or to dress in coloured clothes.

He measured..... heart: As he tried to check her temperature, she tried to test the emotions she had roused in him.

I found that the number.....only one: In her imaginary world of suitors she finally allowed only the presence of one person.

dress myself secretly in a canary-coloured sari: She had to do so secretly, because as a widow she was allowed to dress only in white.

Not half a bad ending: Not at all a bad ending.
finishing touches: The last strokes required to finish a picture or a story, or indeed any piece of work.
absent-minded: Lacking in attention, as if he were thinking of something else.
beside the point: Unrelated to the particular topic she wanted to talk about.
Dada: Elder brother.
to his death: Speaking sarcastically of a man's loss of independence when he gets married. The dramatic irony in these words is only revealed at the end of the story.
lose countenance: Lose his composure, be disconcerted.
there is no illumination, no band of music: At Indian weddings, bright illuminations and music are essential.
deadly darts: Missiles that are meant to give a mortal wound.
the red mark of wife-hood: At their weddings and after they are married, women in India put a vermilion mark in the front parting of their hair. It is removed when the woman becomes a widow.
the first crow began to caw: Crows are the earliest birds to awake. In India ghosts are supposed to vanish when the first crow begins to caw, just as elsewhere they are said to disappear at cock-crow.

THE RIVER STAIRS

This story is supposed to be related by the steps leading down to the bathing-place in the river.
those feet were now without anklets: Because she had become a widow.
Bhagbat: the *Bhagavad Gita*.
at the time of the eclipse......Ganges: It is a custom for Hindus to bathe in the river or the sea during an eclipse, in order to escape from the supposed harmful influence of the phenomenon.
water from the Ganges: Is, of course, considered particularly holy.
on my stony bosom: Because the narrator of the story is the stairway leading down to the bathing-place or *ghat*.
she came to herself: When she could control her feelings and feel her usual self again.
placed the dust of his feet on her head: A gesture of deep devotion in Hindu society.

Bengali Lit – Stories
Stories – Bengali Lit

Price Re. 1-6.